

Ground Zero

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/17958617) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/17958617>.

Rating:

Mature

Archive Warning:

Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Category:

Gen

Fandom:

僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

Character:

Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Bakugou Katsuki, League of Villains (My Hero Academia), Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Mitsuki and Masaru Bakugou, Bakusquad centered

Additional Tags:

Torture, Psychological Torture, Suicidal Thoughts, Mental Anguish, Chronic Illness, Implied/Referenced Self-Harm, BAMF Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Family Feels, Stubborn Bakugou, The bad guys picked the wrong person to mess with, Ace Bakugou, Friendship is the Best Kind of Love, No Romance, not even if you squint, Bamf Bakugou, Misunderstandings between child and parent, Suicide attempt (but not what you think), Touch-Starved, Kidnapped, Best Friend Award goes to Kirishima, Mina is BAMF, Bakugou/Deku sibling shaninigans, Protective Bakusquad, ADHD Kaminari, Dadzawa, Bakugou is done with everyones shit, Complicated Bakugou parents, There is Fluff in here I swear, Hurt/Comfort, Class 1A is family, they are there for each other, Deku is BAMF, Bakugou's stuck between a rock and a Nomu, The humor is dark but there, Deku is worried- what else is new?, All Might is a Dork, Panic Attacks

Language:

English

Collections:

Cloudy's SuperUltraMega Faves, BKG AC, progress, Buried Gems of BNHA, bakugou angst for heart, favs favs favs, bnha fics that are

very very close to killing me, Long Fics to Binge, BKG Fic-List, Collection of treasures that I've cried river if it ever got delete :)), SakurAlpha's Fic Rec of Pure how did you create this you amazing bean, Bakugou Katsuki Street - Verirrts Favorite MHA/BNHA Fics, miQ_y's fav fav fics, Almost every Bakugou fanfic I have read, Best Bakugou-centric with plot focus (that|deserve|attention), Angsty Katsuki is the best type of story <3, Favorite Bakugou Angst with a Dash of Fluff, Magna Opera

Stats:

Published: 2019-03-01 Updated: 2019-12-27 Words: 118,273

Chapters: 18/30

Ground Zero

by [Windschild8178](#)

Summary

In the wake of Kamino, Katsuki is tested more than anyone could imagine. Bound by a villain's quirk to keep his silence or die, he lives each day knowing it might very well be his last. He continues to work towards becoming a hero, keeping his secret from his classmates and teachers, focusing on making it through each day and trying not to allow the panic or depression to get the best of him. When the villain finally corners him with demands in exchange for his life, there is really only one answer Katsuki Bakugou can give.

This features the whole class and the teachers.

Notes

Obviously this is alternative timeline. I really wanted to explore the idea that something else happened at Kamino. It just seems so unrealistic that Katsuki was there for like 72 hours and that he was in the chair the whole time and that nothing else happened to him?

I wanted to do something where Katsuki was sort of forced into a corner and had to deal with the after effects of what happened for months after the initial confrontation at Kamino. I didn't want to do nightmares though, I wanted it to be an actual situation and I wanted it to be pretty personal.

So, I thought of Katsuki's relationship with his parents and thought there was a lot of potential there.

This is not bashing Mitsuki or Masaru though. They are complicated people and they've had good times and bad just like every family. The Bakugou's definitely have a communication problem though and that's very prominent here. Katsuki will definitely draw the wrong conclusion about some of the situation and the villains aren't going to help with that.

And I'm taking liberties with the laws. In My Hero Academia, they mentioned that the standard governments all fell during the Great Collapse and that laws had to be created from scratch.

Since there are forced marriages in the anime based on creating powerful quirks, I imagine that children have a lot less rights than they do in our universe so I've definitely fudged the line here, plus protecting children's rights has only been a line of thinking in the last fifty years or so of history.

Chapter 1: Katsuki Bakugou

Ground Zero

In the wake of Kamino, Katsuki is tested more than anyone could imagine. Bound by a villain's quirk to keep his silence or die, he lives each day knowing it might very well be his last and that when the villain finally corners him with demands in exchange for his life, there is really only one answer Katsuki Bakugou can give.

Chapter 1: Katsuki Bakugou

After being dragged through the portal by his neck, Katsuki lets loose the largest explosion he can directly into whatever hidey hole the villains have taken him. The blast is sent through another dark portal, damaging whatever unfortunate space the gate freak saw fit and all Katsuki could do was hope it wasn't the very flammable forest area his classmates were in.

A split second later, the compression guy has his arm on Katsuki again. The same unpleasant feel of having his body stretched through a tunnel takes hold and he is once more in the damn crystal ball of doom. He can't move, but he can scream, and he does. He screams until his throat is hoarse and hopes, if nothing else they can hear and be annoyed by it.

It all happened so fast.

He never even had a chance to fight back and its that which pisses him off more than anything else. He'd been taken from behind without even knowing. And now he was trapped. Paralyzed from his toes to the end of his hair.

Fuck them.

Fuck them all.

He's aware that time passes, vaguely, and when the compressor unravels around him, he feels cold metal against his back. He brings

his arms up, but they stop mid movement. Metal wires binding him to... the table? His legs are bound as well. He tries to ignite the palm of his hands, but whatever odd bandages are wrapped around them are soaking up all of his sweat. There's nothing to ignite. He turns his head, trying to still the panic as he takes in his surroundings. The compressor freak bows, the mask smiling at him in a much more sadistic way with the wall of medical supplies and tubes directly behind him.

"Special delivery to the Doctor," the man says silkily.

"Fuck you," Katsuki snarls.

"Thank you, Sako, I can take it from here."

Katsuki's head snaps to the other side to see a man dressed as a Doctor standing before the table. A mustache offsetting a rather round, plain looking face.

"If you're certain. He can be quite a handful." Sako tips his top hat, mockingly. "I don't think any harm came to him though, so this is slightly unnecessary."

"You can never be too careful. Besides, his medical file is... intriguing."

"Don't play with him too much, Doctor, Shigaraki has plans for the kid."

"Don't talk about me like I'm not fucking here!"

Bakugou strained against the metal wires, hissing as they dug into his wrists viciously.

"Excitable," the Doctor murmurs, amused.

"Very."

Sako bowed once more before turning and leaving the room altogether. The Doctor watches him, clicking his tongue absently as he grabs a tan folder from the desk directly behind him, flipping through the pages with the slowness of someone purposefully trying to be annoying.

"You got a reason you're trying to draw things out, you piece of shit, or do you just get off on being an overdramatic bitch."

The Doctor chuckled, using his leg to drag a computer chair over to himself, sitting down and staring at Katsuki with a thoughtful look.

“Interesting medical history you have here, young man.” The Doctor tapped the folder on the metal table.

“If you’re waiting for me to ask you how you got hold of that information, you’re gonna be sorely disappointed. I ain’t fucking impressed.”

The Doctor paused.

“You are quite delightful. I think I’m going to enjoy this more than I thought.”

“Yeah?” Katsuki snarled, feeling a level of alarm he’d never felt before rising in his chest. “And what’s that then?”

“You’re only fifteen years old, yet here it says you’ve donated both blood and bone marrow dozens of times. Why is that?”

Katsuki’s eyes narrowed to slits, with the little available movement he was able, he moved his hands so that both of his middle fingers were jutting out. He grinned as the man tutted.

“Could it be that you are the only one that is a match for your father?”

“Why make a big deal of asking,” Katsuki snarled, “if you already know the answer?”

He hated that shit. It was like people who asked for your opinion and then went and did the fucking opposite. Such fake fucking bullshit. Pretending to value someone’s opinion only to flipped the proverbially bird when it didn’t match up with what they wanted to hear.

“Everything has changed since the development of quirks,” the Doctor murmured, almost as if he was some sort of Professor giving a lecture. “Chaos reigned and governments fell, unable to cope with the magnitude of difficulties these abilities posed to society. Our laws once valued the rights of children far more than they do today.”

Katsuki snorted.

“Your talking like you lived through it.

“Not as such, but I have always had a fascination with history and I have been honored with associates who have indeed experienced the

change firsthand.”

“Pull the other leg.”

The Doctor shrugged.

“It is of no concern of mine whether you believe me or not. It is a hard pill to swallow. Our laws nowadays, while moving further and further towards where we once were before the grand collapse, still uphold the idea that children are... commodities rather than people. The idea of garnering bone marrow over and over again from a...”

The Doctor flipped through the medical folder. “...five year old, well, such a thing would have been seen as inhumane and abusive, once upon a time.”

“I chose to give it. Stop fucking dramatizing like some god damn bitch on her cycle.”

“Because if you hadn’t... your father would have died, right?” The Doctor says causally. Katsuki grits his teeth, refusing to answer. What was this fucker’s point? What was he trying to get at? Pansy ass villains and their need to yak and yak. Talking around the point for fucking ever. “I bet you felt like quite the little hero,” the Doctor went on, reading over one of the files even as Katsuki continued to struggle against the wire holding him down. “Did they tell you that you were one? Did they tell you it would be a brave, selfless thing? That a hero would do it? Is that what they told you every time they needed more?”

‘He’s good,’ is his first thought. He knows exactly what this shit bag is implying especially since it’s nothing Katsuki hasn’t thought before. His teeth feel like their cracking, but he breathes through his nose, forcing his heart to stop its attempts to kill him through sheer force of will. He needed to calm down. He needed to think.

“Is that your tactic?” He forces himself to chuckle, to smirk, even though every muscle in his body is rigid. “You’re not even a real doctor, are you? You got some useless degree in psycho babble and now you parade around calling yourself ‘Doctor’ as your villain name to make yourself feel more legit?”

“Your father has a type of cancer that first appeared a few decades after the grand collapse. I’m sure that you are aware of its history, if nothing else,” the Doctor continues, ignoring Katsuki’s barb.

“Those who inherent quirks, eighty-percent of the population, have a different bone structure from normal humans. Quirimorbus is a cancer that attacks and grows, feeding on this unique bone structure first before stretching out and feeding on the quirk itself.”

“Your voice isn’t good enough for you to be enjoying it this much,” Katsuki drawled. “Get to the fucking point.”

“You grew up watching your father slowly die from this cancer,” The Doctor said thoughtfully. “Then, some time last year, radiation treatment finally showed success. The cancer went into remission. Truly a lucky thing.”

The folder hit the desk with a bang.

Katsuki almost flinched.

“It is a genetic cancer. Inherited from parent to child.”

“What’s this? A scare tactic? Nice try, asshole, but I didn’t inherit it.”

At this, the Doctor grinned, pulling up his sleeves to reveal his fingers. The tips were black.

“It is a recessive trait. I’m sure that they check you every time you go to the hospital just to make sure things are still going well. Chances are they don’t expect any signs of the cancer until at least your late twenties and there’s every chance you could live your whole life without ever experiencing any signs of it at all. Maybe not even your child. Maybe your grandchild will be the next for it to show up in. Who knows?”

That grin was fucking sadistic.

Katsuki pulled all of his weight as far away from the man as possible, straining painfully against the wires as the black fingertips traced his chest, thankfully clothed. When they get a little too close to his mouth he snarls, baring his teeth and trying his damnest to bite those fucking digits... teach him a god damn lesson about personal space.

The Doctor chuckles as he pulls away.

“I watched the Sports Festival, of course, but seeing you face to face, you truly are a savage, feral kid. It is no wonder Shigaraki sees potential in you as a villain.”

“Screw you.”

“No thanks, I’ve already had fun with my assistant today, perhaps tomorrow.”

Katsuki stills at the threat, revulsion sliding its way down his spine. No, no, no, no, no.... the panic must show on his face, or his labored breathing must of given himself away, because the man laughed uproariously.

The black tipped fingers tap his face.

“Come now, a pretty thing like you panicking in such a manner is disgraceful, surely it wouldn’t be your first?”

The grin this time is lecherous and suddenly the idea of being restrained scares Katsuki a hell of a lot more than a moment ago. He flinches violently back, feeling warmth sliding down along his wrists before he ever feels the pain.

“Alright, alright, calm down now, I’m certainly not here for that right now. I was only joking.” The Doctor tuts. Katsuki tries to get his breathing under control, but he can’t. Not with this motherfucker hovering over him like some fucking ra... He stops his thoughts abruptly. Tries to think of something else. Anything else.

Deku’s stupid fucking muttering.

Kirishima’s annoying perky morning-ness.

Kaminari’s idiotic memes.

Anything.

“Dissociation so early on? Or just distraction?” The Doctor mutters, tone amused. A sharp pain strikes through his stomach and Katsuki is forced to look at the man, his fingertips hovering over his stomach. No wound though. No blood. What did he...? “My Quirk,” the Doctor tells him. “It is much like Recovery Girls, you could say that we are two sides of the same coin.” Katsuki’s eyes widen as he sees the black tips begin to glow, the tiniest of black tendrils leaping off of the tips, like microscopic anchors. “I can remove infections, diseases, cancers... anything really, with the tips of these fingers. More than that though, I can control them. Spread them among masses of people. I have.”

Katsuki swallows bile at the implication.

“Whole crowds have walked away without knowing that in a few years time they will be in a doctor’s office being diagnosed with terminal illness. With no one the wiser. All these amateur villains are so... brash. They are like children, wanting attention for their deeds, acknowledgement for their efforts and existence.”

“So you’re what? Just using the hand’s freak?” Katsuki asked.

“Not as such. I truly admire Shigaraki, he will grow into a fine villain one day. Once he gets some of these more childish notions out of his system. His... father, simply has me checking in on him from time to time, to makes sure things are going smoothly. After I am finished with you, I will be heading out.”

Katsuki eyed the still glowing fingers nervously, trying to keep his face as blank as Icyhot’s always was.

“Apple didn’t rot far from the freak tree then?”

“All for One has been playing this game for much longer than anyone else alive. Shigaraki couldn’t hope to compete, but he does well.”

“All for One?”

The black tips moved to his chest, the Doctor smiling at him knowingly.

“Its cute that you think you can get information from me in your position. Admirable, but cute.”

“Know more now than I did a few minutes ago,” Katsuki grinned.

The Doctor nodded in acknowledgement.

“Yes, I imagine that those around you aren’t particularly willing to give information to such a... passionate, violent soul as yourself. Not willing to trust someone who demonstrates such strong signs of villainy.”

Katsuki is struck by the truth in that. The fact that the Pro-heroes were weary of offering him internships. The weariness of his classmates despite how restrained he tried to be around them. He flips the Doctor off again, trying to show he’s unaffected by his words.

“An abrasive young man like yourself whose entire being strives towards the destruction of others...” The Doctor mumbles absently, as

if he didn't have Katsuki strapped down to a table against his will, as if they were talking while sharing fucking tea or something. "You can throw the title of hero over it all you want, but no one is fooled. Even if you do become a Pro-Hero, the public will never acknowledge you as a real hero, your coworkers will never fully trust you, and your mentors will always be weary of you."

"You don't know jack shit," Katsuki snarled.

Everyone was always so quick to assume they knew him. Knew his limits. Knew his personality. Knew his life. Knew what he would be. It was infuriating.

"Shigaraki wants to give you a choice. He wants you to aide them in their cause."

Katsuki scoffed.

"I feel the same way," the Doctor nodded. "You are nowhere near ready. You've been raised to admire and respect heroes. You know nothing else. As you are now, you would never agree to such things."

The Doctor's black fingertips sunk into his chest.

He jerked, a scream tearing out from his throat.

Pain. Pain. Fuck. Shit.

"As I mentioned earlier," the Doctor continued, "Quirimorbus is a cancer that is genetic, which means there is a recessive trait I can activate."

Panic swelled in him at those words. His bones ached. They felt as if they were splintering, every inch of them. Breaking into pieces and stabbing outwards towards his muscles and through his skin.

"There are six stages of the cancer. As I know you are aware."

The fingers left his chest, but the pain remained. He tried to curl into himself, but the wires restricted his movement, a low, agonized moan escaping.

"I've accelerated the rate of its development. In the next ten or so hours you shall feel the cancer move through each, an act that normally takes ten years. Do not worry though. You will not die. I will remove it completely from your body once I come back. This is simply

to... loosen you up a bit, to understand completely the situation you are in and all the repercussions that comes with fighting the path you are so clearly destined to undergo.”

Katsuki fought for breath, unwilling tears escaping as his body shook.

And then the Doctor began to leave the room.

He was really... going to abandon him like this...

He wanted to curse at the man, wanted to grab him by the little hair on his fucking balding head and drag him to the ground and punch him in that smug fucking face of his. That sadistic asshole.

But he couldn't.

He couldn't move.

He couldn't...

At three years old, his dad was his hero. Katsuki loved to listen to his father hum gently as he cooked. He loved the way his dad would gently ruffle his hair. How soft spoken his dad was, how, even though it was so soft, he could command Katsuki's mom to do anything.

Katsuki was nothing like that.

His words always came out so loud even when he tried to imitate the sound. He walked loud and moved loud and everyone always knew the moment he entered the room no matter how sneaky he tried to be. He hated that about himself. It was frustrating. His dad would always tell him it was a good thing. Katsuki would be like his mom who never let anyone push her around. She was a roaring wind on the high seas, he'd tell Katsuki. She was a brilliant, beaming light in an otherwise dark horizon.

Katsuki still preferred the soft to the blunt though. He loved to hang out with his dad in the kitchen, helping him with the cooking and listening to softly spoken tales of the fashion industry, about how once upon a time his dad had wanted to be a hero, of tales of Katsuki's grandmother who was one.

His dad was his best friend in the whole world.

Then, of course, his mom had introduced him to Auntie Inko. They

had been best friends in college and Katsuki had delighted in meeting Izuku. The little green haired kid was just like his daddy. Shy and soft spoken and never brash like him. He instantly liked the kid.

He dragged Izuku around after him from place to place and game to game.

He wanted to impress Izuku with everything.

They compared their figurines and fought ‘bad guys’ and watched hero movies together and planned an entire future of crime fighting as partners before lunch. They would always be the best of friends.

Shortly after Katsuki turned four his dad collapsed in the kitchen.

The first stage of Quirimorbus. Aching bones and a burning chronic pain. There had been no one to watch Katsuki so late at night so they’d taken him with them to the hospital. His dad had cried in the car. It had been terrifying.

They’d stuck long needles in him and hooked him up to machines and the adults had all talked like he wasn’t there. Words he didn’t understand were thrown around and amidst all the fear and stress, he’d somehow fallen asleep on a chair outside of his dad’s room.

“Katsuki.”

His mom shook him awake, her eyes red and her too loud, jarring voice subdued in a way he’d never heard before. He stared at her blankly before remembering where they were and looking around as if his father would march out of the room with a soft smile on his face and an apology for scaring him.

It didn’t happen.

“Katsuki, I need you to be very brave for me sweetie, do you think you can do that?”

He rubbed at his eyes.

“Where’s daddy?”

“Daddy’s in a bad way. There’s a special Doctor here who has a Quirk that can help him, but he needs a small bit of blood from you, a match for daddy that’s clean and healthy.”

Katsuki nodded, even though he didn't really understand.

"Okay."

"There's my brave boy."

He wouldn't understand until later, but apparently Quirimorbus had a 100% fatality rate. Until ten years ago. It had only been recent that the diagnostic didn't immediately come with a death sentence. As long as it was caught in the first stage and treated correctly there was a good chance the patient would recover.

There was one downside though.

Every four months or so the blood and bones of the patient needed to be 'healed.' Which required a sample of blood and a sample of bone marrow from a match that was healthy. The first few times they were able to find bone marrow matches from other sources, but his father's was rare and matches were a difficult, time consuming process to procure over and over and over again.

Katsuki was a perfect match.

At five, his dad was still his hero. He got his quirk and he loved to show it off to his dad. At stage two, symptoms being extreme fatigue, chronic pain, and a weakness of the body that left him unable to move much, his dad often did design work for the Fashion Industry from his bed. Katsuki would sit for hours on the bed with him, talking about his adventures with Izuku and some of the other neighborhood boys.

His dad never complained so Katsuki made it a point to never say anything about how donating blood sometimes left him feeling dizzy or how giving bone marrow left that part of his body aching in a way that made everything a little harder. It was for his daddy and totally worth it.

His dad would design him whatever clothes he dreamed up too. Sitting in bed and sewing up All Might themed jackets and really awesome hero gear and they'd talked for hours and hours and then Katsuki would curl up and sleep right there on the bed when he'd tuckered himself out.

“I have to go to the doctor’s tomorrow,” Izuku told him.

Katsuki grimaced.

“That sucks, are you sick?” He peered at his best friend in suspicion. His dad hadn’t looked sick either. “I can help you if you are.”

“No,” Izuku did that fidgety thing like what his dad did when his mom was asking him stuff.

Katsuki huffed in impatience, taking the aggressive tone his mom did to get his dad to talk.

“What is it? If you didn’t want to tell me, then why bring it up!?”

“Its just... he’s gonna help me figure out what my quirk is.”

“Oh, is that all?” Katsuki felt relief. It had scared him for a moment. He thought Izuku might need to have the long needles and the machines his dad needed or that Katsuki himself might need to give more things to his friend to save him. Which, Katsuki was brave, he could handle it, but that stuff always made him feel bad and it would be worse if he had to do it more.

A hero always found a way though.

“Well, its probably something like super soft like giving people extra warm hugs or something,” Katsuki scuffed. “You know... things people don’t really think about? I bet you already have it. Its probably something stupid like you smile and people cheer up.”

Izuku looked up at him from beneath his bangs, big green eyes wide and glistening.

Oops. He hadn’t meant it in a bad way.

No one ever got him. Especially Izuku. It was frustrating and he hated it. Sometimes he wondered if it wouldn’t be better if he just didn’t ever speak. Soft heroes were needed to, after all. They were the ones who picked up after the awesome heroes kicked the bad guys asses.

“Listen, I bet its not gonna be as cool as mine, but it will probably be a good one.”

Izuku nodded, but he still looked upset as he went back to drawing his

hero costume.

Katsuki sighed.

Why did he bother trying to cheer people up if they didn't want to listen?

The arguments started when his dad reached stage three later that year. Stage three was when parts of his dad's body started too... collapse? Dark purple marks blotting the area and painful to the touch. Difficulty breathing. Difficulty with everything.

The fights were always about the same thing.

"Fight! Fight this you useless man!" His mom would scream. "If you weren't so fucking soft, if you'd fight harder..."

"Masaru, you can't just give up. You can't. Tuck in that vagina of yours for one fucking minute and stand up!"

"Baby, honey, please, please, you need to eat. Don't be so weak willed. You can make it if you only try harder!"

On and on and on, like a background mantra.

Useless. Soft. Weak.

He'd never thought of his dad like that.

That soft was bad, yet it was killing him.

He hated it. Hated the idea that his dad could die because he wasn't fighting hard enough. Hated that he might lose him because he wasn't strong enough. Hated that the same things that Katsuki loved so much about his dad were also the things that would kill him.

Suddenly he started to despise the similarities between his dad and Izuku.

He would never tell Deku this, but when he'd learned the little green eyed kid was quirkless, it was like hearing his dad being diagnosed all

over again. All the things he'd admired when they were really little had turned violently on its head.

Deku was no longer kind.

He was weak.

Deku was no longer sweet spoken.

He was cowardly.

Deku was no longer something Katsuki admired.

He was something to be feared.

Deku was just like his dad and his dad broke. Katsuki watched his dad croak and scream and wither away and give up. Katsuki watched Deku shy away and flinch and fall down and not get up. He hated that weakness.

He wanted nothing to do with it.

But still Deku would follow him, try to be friends with him, smile at him. No matter what Katsuki did to make him go away, Deku always came back. It made him feel sick to his stomach. Deku reminded him too much of his dad. He didn't want that reminder in his only safe place at school. He didn't want to be anywhere near either of them at this point.

He was seven and then eight and then nine and the cancer was at a neutral point. Not getting worse, but not getting better, thanks entirely to Katsuki donating so often, giving so much. His dad was trapped in stage three of the cancer, weakening in will and heart and courage and all the good things in the world and Katsuki felt...

Everything he did in the house now was too loud, too much, too bad, too explosive. His dad flinched at anything he did and then... he started flinching when Katsuki walked into the room or talked to him.

It was hard to be home.

So he focused all his energy on school, on training, on ignoring Deku as much as possible and beating him down when Deku wouldn't leave him be. He focused all his energy, all his heart on being the best. He wanted to be as loud as possible, as abrasive and rude and harsh as he could be. Anything to be nothing like his dad or Deku.

When he was ten, his dad tried to kill himself.

Only he passed out before he finished. Too weak in the body to complete the job. The gun had been loaded and the safety turned off. There had only been one bullet in the barrel and it had been curled in his hands where Mitsuki found him, Katsuki trailing behind with the groceries in hand.

There's days after that where Katsuki comes home to an empty house. His dad being committed to the hospital full time and his mother working and spending time at the hospital. Katsuki isn't allowed 'to see your father like this' his mom tells him repeatedly. 'You need to keep your shit together so that I can make sure he has his shit together,' she tells him when he complains about being left alone all the time. 'You need to be stronger than this. You want to be a hero, don't you? Don't bitch.'

Katsuki knows he scares Deku during that time. He goes almost a month speaking only when teachers call upon him to answer a question. He ignores not only Deku, but everyone. He doesn't quite stop taking care of himself, but it's close. Meals are missed and sometimes he goes four or five days without a shower. It's not quite enough to garner anyone's attention outside of Deku's, but it's enough that he scares himself one day when he passes out on the floor.

He doesn't do that again.

When he's eleven, his dad's cancer finally begins to recede. It's a new experimental medicine alongside the normal blood and bone marrow treatment. The recovery is long and hard and so very quiet that Katsuki wonders more than once if they've all secretly died and are just pretending to be alive inside the house and just don't know it.

His parents are now reemerging back in his life and it's strange and weird and uncomfortable. He knows how to take care of himself. He knows how to cook and clean and wash and he knows when to get up for school and he's responsible. He doesn't need his mom to make breakfast for him or to help with his homework. He doesn't need them

at all.

‘This is the person you want to be?’ His mom shouts at him one day. ‘A little ungrateful shit? You think just because everyone else thinks you walk on water that I’ll treat you like that? You ain’t no prince!’

He and his mom fight a lot.

They fight about stupid stuff and they fight about big stuff. His dad is like a shadow. Never saying much and withdrawing to the point that Katsuki doesn’t really recognize the person who sits at the table with them.

His dad is there, but Katsuki still misses him and he hates that. It’s a weakness in himself, to want something that he can’t have. His dad has fallen and crumbled and after all this time there’s no way to really force the pieces back together again. His dad isn’t ever going to sit on a bed with him talking about anything and everything ever again. He isn’t going to design Katsuki’s stupid ideas and he’s not going to smile softly or nudge him reassuringly or make up stories with him about superheroes.

Sometimes he wonders if it wouldn’t be easier if his dad wasn’t there at all.

It’s a horrible thought that keeps him up at night and he quickly stamps down on it so hard and so viciously that he hopes it never, ever comes again. It’s all so suffocating. He feels overwhelmed all the time and only keeping his mind busy with schoolwork and his body with working out and running keeps him going.

He’s thirteen and UA is within his reach. He needs to escape. He needs to get away from his parents as quickly as possible before the depressive air starts to leak into his skin like an infection. His dad’s cancer has finally gone away completely. His dad is putting on a healthy amount of weight and is starting to go back to work full time.

His parents are starting to fall in love again.

Everything is going good.

But Katsuki feels like an intruder in his own family. An irregularity

that causes disruption every time he enters and peace when he leaves.

UA isn't just a top school for superheroes, its an escape route. If he can get in then he'll be closer to being a real superhero, to being something that matters. All his time and energy will be dedicated to the extensive, intense hero training. He'll practically never be home. There will be no reminders, no interaction with his parents, he can practically be his own adult once he gets into UA.

He panics when he hears Deku wants to go to UA.

Because the little shit is resilient and fucking clever. Too clever. He has always kept pretty darn close to Katsuki in grades and his biggest flaw has always been disregarding his body. The little nerd doesn't work out at all, but knowing the little twerp also means that he'll find a way. The little shit will follow him, like he always does, and the thought is enough to turn his stomach.

He can't.

He can't come to Katsuki's safe zone.

Reminding him every second of the day of soft smiles and nice things and spineless attitudes. A living breathing flinching, weak hearted, easily broken, shadow of a kid who wants to be something he physically cannot be.

"Just pray you'll be born with a quirk in your next life and take a swan dive off the roof of the building."

He doesn't regret it.

He doesn't.

He. Does. Not.

He fucking does. Fuck. He does. He's just as weak willed and spineless as his fucking dad and Deku. God damn it. He refuses to apologize though. He hates Deku. He might regret the words, but he doesn't regret the intent.

Deku needs to get it through his thick head that being quirkless means he might get into UA, but it won't be the hero program. It will be the

General Education Program and that would break the little shit. He wasn't strong willed and he was too fucking soft and watching everybody else in the hero program from afar would fucking destroy him.

Didn't he get that?

He's needs to be realistic here. He needs to go off and work for some business helping kids or talking to troubled people or some shit that's inspiring or something that's not physically beyond him. Most of all though... he needs to stay the fuck away from Katsuki.

Every time he has to look at that stupid nerd, he just feels anger and resentment and hatred. He's all that's wrong in his life and he just wishes Deku would take a hint and leave him be.

He's fifteen and has been kidnapped.

He is at stage four of the Quirimorbus.

'There's no coming back from that stage,' his mind tells him, unhelpfully. His lungs refuse to expand fully. He can't feel his feet or his hands anymore. He knows if he could turn his head at this point to see, they would be an ugly purplish black in color.

Stage Four, Katsuki knows, is when the law allows patients to choose a mercy killing if they so desire. It is the stage that no amount of medication or treatment or transfusions can cure or help. It is simply pain. Agony. Paralysis.

Katsuki can feel drool sliding out of his mouth, he can feel it sticking to his cheek, but he can't quite close his mouth. Every time he does, there's a clicking of the bones in his face and its like a grinder has been taken to the bones there.

He is fifteen and has been kidnapped.

He is at stage five.

He can't feel his hips anymore. He can't move even if he wanted to. His back feels as if all the bones are grinding together there. His heart

feels more like a throbbing, living thing. It is all he has left. A heart and lungs ramming into one another.

Beating.

Breathing.

Beating.

Breathing.

Throb. Throb. Throb.

He is fifteen and has been kidnapped.

He is at stage six and he is going to die.

There is nothing left. No feeling at all. His breaths stagger, halt, stagger, halt. They will stop soon. Agony has consumed his mind for so many hours that this is actually quite nice. He can't say goodbye to anyone, but he pretends to.

He pretends to tell Deku to not be a weak ass nerd and to grow a spine so he can actually pull off his idiotic fucking dream.

He pretends to tell his dad that he's sorry he didn't try harder to be there for him.

He pretends to give his mom a hug cause he's not sure what to say to her.

He pretends a lot of things to a lot of different classmates. Mainly the moron patrol for their idiotic choice for picking him to hang out with. Especially Kirishima who should really fucking know better than to slack off all the God damn time when the idiot had such golden potential.

He pretends to tell All Might to watch the nerd's back.

It's as things are starting to go dark that he hears the distant sound of footsteps.

"Oops, left you a little too long, haven't I?"

Pretends to flip the fucker off.

He is fifteen and has been kidnapped.

He is not dead.

Why the fuck isn't he dead?

"Finally quiet then, Katsuki Bakugou?"

He does not have the energy to so much as glare. It is taking everything in him to simply keep breathing. Sweat covers him from head to toe. He is slick with it. His body is trembling hard enough that there are little spasms, jerking against the wire, hitting the metal table beneath him. It hurts, but it's like a drop of water compared to the ocean he's been drowning in for hours.

"Half a day," the Doctor notes, "in case you were wondering."

'Motherfucking piece of shit,' Katsuki's mind seethed. 'Sadistic fucking bastard.'

Nothing comes out though.

He has been rendered mute in the aftermath of that.

"Now that you've been softened up," the Doctor ends the last word with a pop on the P. "Here is the threat."

A small thing escapes Katsuki's throat. It's a little hysterical, the noise reminiscent of a laugh, but cracked. The Doctor moves forward with a needle, stabbing it into Katsuki's arm and drawing blood. Once it's pulled out, full, the man taps it and holds it up to the light as if admiring it. And then he puts it up to his own arm, the needle hovering over veins, and inserts. Katsuki's own blood goes into the monster.

"When Shigaraki asks you to join the League, you will do so."

'I'd rather die,' Katsuki thinks, but he still can't respond.

“With your blood in me, I no longer need to physically touch you to give you the Quirimorbus. I can manifest it in you at any stage, at any time, for any length of time I so please. There is no need for you to suffer from it though, All for One has made his wishes clear that he desires Shigaraki to succeed and Shigaraki wants you.”

‘Shigaraki can go fuck off.’

“Of course, we can’t have him believing you were coerced into joining. It would defeat the purpose of what he wants. We can’t have his journey being diverted in anyway.”

What was this? The Doctor and this All for One were manipulating the entire situation from the shadows, creating end results before the League’s leader could make one move forward. Guaranteeing results so that the crazy psycho got everything he needed.

The Doctor made a hand motion. From the corner of the room, Katsuki saw a young woman walk up to them. Silver hair pulled back tight against a face that looked painted on. Her movements were stiff, but her smile was relaxed, almost lazy.

“My assistant, her quirk means she was practically born to be a villain, the ability to force others to retain silence. It is widely versatile. She can render individuals mute or on a more specialized scale, she can render them incapable of communication (spoken, written, hand gestures, etc.) for certain topics.”

The woman smiled, grabbing Katsuki’s neck with the enthusiasm of a child getting their hands on a puppy. A burning sensation encircled the spot from where she touched all the way around to the nape of his neck.

“Anything to do with myself or my assistant is now... taboo. Should you try to communicate my actions to Shigaraki in any way, you will not only be unable to, but Rheina here will know about it immediately and I will bring the Quirimorbus to stage six. No second chances, Katsuki.”

He passes out.

The next time he is aware, truly aware, he is strapped down in a chair.

His hands are bound and locked inside a box he is, unfortunately familiar with. A quirk suppressor. Though why it was necessary when he could still feel the strange bandages around his hands, he has no idea.

Hand's freak is rambling.

This is just fucking great.

He's surrounded by his kidnappers. Exhaustion and phantom pain gripping his entire body. He's not even paying attention to their words. The television is on and their news outlets covering UA and the attack. And his honest emotions are just... he doesn't care. He wants to crawl into a hole and sleep for a decade. He feels the odd out of body experience that comes with trying to stay up too late for too many days in a row.

This is all such a god damn sham.

He wants to mock Shigaraki. He wants to tell the A-hole that he's never actually made a real decision in his life. He's been spoon fed this farce of leadership. It's clear he's not the true power behind all of this.

But he can't.

He stays silent, for the most part, glowering at them as they yak and yak and yak back and forth between them. About real heroes and fakes, about half formed plans and declarations, and it's all just so... fucking hysterical.

Finally, finally, Shigaraki turns to him. He's already told them to fuck off numerous times tonight, but he feels this time is different. They've been yammering on and they've made their point and they are ready to get down to business.

"I'll ask you one more time, aspiring hero, Katsuki Bakugou," the tone is mocking, almost. Shigaraki turns somber as he leans forward on his stool. His eyes are anxious and excited. Like a child whose finally made it to the front of the line in a candy store. "Will you join me?"

The thought of it all ending here is painful.

Katsuki doesn't want to die.

Especially not like that.

But anything else is unacceptable.

He will win like All Might, that will never change, he will face them head on.

He will never join them.

Never.

After the rescue, Katsuki spends the entire evening waiting to die.

He watches the fight between All Might and All For One with Deku beside him and is sickened that its all in vain. That All Might...

He waits to die at the police station.

He waits to die in his living room as his mom sobs into his chest and his dad pulls him into a hug that is almost suffocating.

He waits to die in his bed that night, staring up at the ceiling.

But it never happens.

Death does not come.

Not the following day or the day after. The shock of it all eventually wares off and suspicion begins to take hold. What are they waiting for? Had the Doctor lied? Had he been bluffing about being able to do it from anywhere? Did it require something more that Katsuki wasn't aware of and the moment the Doctor was able to fulfill that need he would drop dead?

Four days pass before he gets an answer.

It is as 11:59 moves seamlessly into 12:00 on another sleepless night that Katsuki's feet and hands go numb. He drops to the ground of his room and the bottle of water hits the floor with a 'thud,' making more noise than his pained lungs are capable of. Pain wrap around every muscle and bone and inch of his body. He has just enough ability to curl into a ball as he trembles.

This is it.

This is how he dies.

Only he doesn't.

One hour on the dot, as 12:59 moves into 1:00 A.M, it all stops. He can breathe and move, though the lingering agony leaves him stunned and breathless. He can move, but he doesn't want to. The thought of moving makes him want to vomit. So he stays there on the ground for who knows how long, trembling and breathing too deep, trying to pull himself together.

And then it happens.

The smallest portal Katsuki has witnessed so far from the gates creep forms over his desk. A tiny piece of paper fluttering to the wood and sitting there innocently like it wasn't a fucking condemnation of his life. On it is written a message in red, as if it needed the extra dramatic affects to be fucking terrifying.

'It appears as if you need further conditioning before you are ready. That is fine.'

Chapter 2: Resolve

Chapter Summary

Katsuki continues to live his life, learning to adjust to his horrible circumstances.

*Using this chapter to go over the gap between the Kamino arc and the current arc after the internships, during Semester II. I despise when there is a problem and people instantly know. There like... that character twitched the wrong way, obviously they have been suffering under this terrible thing for weeks! I must investigate! Get out of here with that shit writing.

Chapter 2: Resolve

It happens every night around midnight.

He buys a mouthguard and enough pain killers to support a small army. At first, he strategizes ways he could take down the Doctor. When he questions the heroes involved in his rescue, there is not a hint that the man even existed. There is no way to dig deeper without speaking of it. There is no way to subtly investigate without any sort of lead or without accidentally wording a question too close to that.

He gives up.

He stresses his way through the Licensing Exam. His body feels as if it hasn't unclenched since Kimono and there's no release. There's no way to unleash the sheer terror and stress that attack him for days and weeks on end. To appease the guilt eating away at him that All Might's career ended because he was kidnapped, because the hero tried so hard to save him.

He fails.

It's like being taken from a desert at noon to being dropped in the middle of the tundra on the coldest of nights. The villains are winning. The Doctor is winning. They're not here and yet they are winning against him without ever lifting a single fucking finger.

Accepting reality is hard.

He starts down his list. He pays Kirishima back for the goggles. He tries to be the best friend the idiot deserves, though he's never been good at being social or supportive or any of that crap. But he tries.

He hashes things out with Deku. Kind of.

Its like stabbing his heart, really, then tossing it in a grinder. The fight feels right. Hearing Deku tell him he's not going to allow Katsuki to push him around, to use him like a mat, is relieving. It's easier to accept then that Deku might be like his dad, but that in no way means that they are the same person. Deku doesn't give up. He fights forward against all odds.

Still a fucking nerd though.

All Might is both harder and easier. Mainly because the man seems to get it better than even Katsuki does. He seems to understand where all the messed up, twisted emotions inside of him have come from and always seems to know exactly what to say. Its unnerving and relieving and entirely predictable because it's fucking All Might.

He, somewhat, makes up with his parents. In a way. Kind of. If you squint.

He's working on it.

His classmates are all fucking extras and its annoying as fuck to try to figure them out. Caring about such stupid shit all the time. He tries, but he's not so good. He fucks up a lot. His words are just never... right. They never seem to unravel in the way he intends them to and no one seems good at translating except for Kirishima and sometimes the... uh, he can't even, sometimes 'the Bakusquad' understands. That fucking name. He swears.

He seems that now that he's set his mind to being... friendlier, the world is set to prove to challenge him. He's decided, as he finishes the remedial course, that he really, really, doesn't like children. 'Winning' their hearts is the stupidest thing he's ever heard and he sucks at it. It's a fucking miracle with a heavy dose of his 'team' that he's able to scrape that shit into a pass.

The Cultural Festival is a test of patience he feels he fails at too. Everyone seems so happy he's trying though. No one pushes him too out of his comfort zone and they... everyone takes what he has to say

to heart. Its... nice.

He feels as if he's really...

If the Doctor came at the end of the Festival, Bakugou feels like he could be okay with that now. He doesn't have a thousand and one things he wished he'd told people. The whole thing runs late and everyone is too excited. They babble on into the night and Bakugou slips away.

He takes three pain killers even though he knows it won't help. He puts his mouth guard in and set his headphones to play music to make it all seem like its going by a bit faster. He sets a glass of water up beside the bed.

His body is already tense.

He lays down, looking through his phone at all the pictures. Kaminary had gotten ahold of it at some point. There's dozen of photos here he'd never have taken. Deku with the little girl Eri. Jirou lifting

Tsuyu in the air in a hug. Tokoyami eyeing Mineta suspiciously. Ashido and Aoyama dancing.

When midnight strikes, the phone drops from his hand. Everything is numb except for his heart and lungs. Pounding in sync, in pain. Stage six. The Doctor rarely does stage six. Bakugou wonders if it's a whim or if the guy's pissed and looking to take it out on someone. It doesn't really matter though.

What matters is that tonight the music isn't helping because his breathing is too loud. It's too hard to take in air. Hot tears slide down his face, but he can hardly feel it compared to everything else. It hurts. It hurts. It hurts so fucking bad.

He's all alone and it hurts.

The stupidest urge strikes him, like it does some nights, that he wishes someone were here to hold him through this. He wishes he could grab ahold of someone and just... a song ends and another begins. The flashing symbols on the clock are too much for his brain while he's hurting so bad, but the songs, the music, its easier to keep track of that. The pain lasts for fifteen or so songs, thirty if the bastard is feelings particularly fucking sadistic.

'Someone, please help me.'

There is no one though. In this, he is alone, utterly. One wrong move, one misspoken word, and he's dead. Maybe it would be better to get it over with, but... he doesn't want to die. He won't do what the villains want, but he isn't so willing to give up these last moments either. These last days.

He endures.

A hero endures, no matter the cost, right, All Might?

They endure.

And each morning he gets up and he pretends that nothing at all happened. He's grumpy and too passionate and impatient and strong. He goes to bed ridiculously early and rises along with everyone to start the day.

They don't need to know the reason.

He glares at the teasing of 'beauty sleep' and 'Bakugouness' and 'pretty boy' remarks that often go hand in hand with his schedule. Their disappointment when he refuses to watch late night movies.

Their confusion when he grows more and more hostile the later it gets on late night training sessions with Aizawa.

No one needs to know.

No one can know.

His dad's old pills are in the cabinet still. The old man doesn't need them anymore, but no one's gone through the trouble of cleaning out any of the bathrooms or closets for all the medical junk because who the fuck knows what's in the future, right?

Katsuki carefully goes through all the labels and he does his god damn research online because he's not an imbecile. This shit is legit addictive. It is dangerous and has side effects and anything that affects his hero training is an instant no.

But he needs something.

The pain is too much. He can't explain the situation to anyone. He can't reach out for help. That fucking sleaze bag villain made sure of

that. The exhaustion itself from all of this is killing him.

So he takes his dad's strong ass pain killers. The stuff you can't get over the counter. If he's being honest, the stuff he's taking now, he's taking so many of them every night that it's getting dangerous and the help is minimal. He never thought he'd be the kind of person, the kind of son to steal shit from his parents, no less fucking drugs, but he's trapped between a rock and a hard place and if he could (if he could physically tell them without instantly, you know, fucking dying) then he would.

He's not some lame-ass punk whose going to amount to nothing but drugs, for fuck's sake.

At least that's what he repeats to himself over and over and over again as he shoves the medicine in his bag. He feels fucking guilty as hell for this. It's stupid because if either of his parents knew, if anyone knew, they'd personally be shoving the medicine in his hands themselves. He knows that.

It still doesn't stop him from stiffening up the next morning when his mom comes downstairs. The Hag snipes at him, but no more than normal. She doesn't look at him accusingly or with disappointment. She doesn't know. She's doesn't have a fucking clue.

It's fine.

He's fine.

Its freaking dandy.

There's three or four types in his bag and Katsuki decides its best to test them out one at a time to see which one works best for his needs. He knows his dad didn't handle some of them well. The Hydromorphon injection had been the only thing that didn't cause him to vomit constantly, so Katsuki is nervous he'll be the same way. If he's affected negatively by these pills then there is no hospital injection option open to him. Katsuki will just have to suck it up and deal.

The Methadone turns out to be a hell no. It makes him antsy, his need to move already higher than most, it makes it go off the charts. Sitting in class is a nightmare. Waiting in line for lunch is unbearable. His body feels as if all the atoms have been ignited. And it makes him itch to the point that Katsuki had broken the skin from wrist to elbow. Kirishima catches him at it and is horrified by what he's doing,

worried Katsuki is hurting himself. The melodramatic idiot. He tells him that someone put itching powder in all of his clothes and he'll kill the bastard when he finds them. That has Kirishima and the loser group snickering at him for days, but it's worth it to stop them from thinking stupid shit.

Oxymorphone is also a no go. It works, but he spends every night sleeping on the floor in the bathroom because he can't stop vomiting. He's light-headed and there's been a few times during class when he had to excuse himself to be sick and that's not good enough.

Percocet turns out to be the best option. He only needs it for a short time at night. That single hour, so he's not exceeding the limits. It leaves him drowsy still during the first two classes of the day, but after that, he's fine. There's a slight headache he gets a couple of times a week, but it's nothing compared to the amount of pain it takes away during the night, so it's tolerable.

Katsuki is a morning person and he knows the nerd notices the seemingly one-eighty he's done. Stumbling into class half asleep and slumping into his chair. Clothes far more rumpled than they should be. Entirely too quiet if he's being honest, but he really can't dredge up the energy to care about Deku's worried looks. He's always himself by the afternoon so Deku leaves it be.

His other classmates are still in the dark though. Moving into the dorms coincided with his kidnapping, so they'd never known anything outside of his sleeping patterns here. Katsuki, early to bed, late to rise. It's an odd thing, but no one comments or questions the ridiculous amount of sleep he appears to need, outside of Kaminari's occasional teasing. It's just Bakugou's way.

He has to admit, he's sort of impressed himself.

The circumstances he's in are shit. There's no way out and yet... He's actually managing all of it rather well, he thinks. He's an A+ trooper for this shit. The villains think their breaking him down, but he's handling everything they throw at him.

He deserves a standing ovation for this shit.

He's...

...not handling shit.

It lasted for three full hours tonight.

Which leads to a bad day in training. Stiff and hurting. He hits the ground hard. Kaminari tries to help him up, but Katsuki snarls in his throat at him and forces himself to stand on his own. He can do this. No one is going to stand in his fucking way. Not the Doctor. And definitely not himself.

He hits the ground hard. Again and again and again.

He gets up again and again and again.

His classmates are hesitant. Weary. They tell him its okay to rest. They can see the dark rings under his eyes and his haggard stance. They tell him its okay if he didn't get enough sleep. He doesn't have to prove himself to them. Its one bad day. He can rest and no one's going to punish him for it.

But they don't fucking get it.

He needs to do this for himself.

He needs to prove that the Villain hasn't won.

He gets up.

Oddly enough. Not a lot changes even though they move into the dorms. They launch back into lessons, regular education and heroics work, much like nothing at all has happened. Aizawa is as deadpan and strict as normal. All Might... he speaks a bit more subdued, but there's still the passion, still the overdramatic way of phrasing things. It's comforting.

Not like there was a chance in hell he'd ever say that out loud. He tucks the thought away in his own mind as he listens to the idiots perform a rendition of ADHA personified as they switch from topic to topic at random and bounce along the walls like their god damn three. Even though he doesn't listen to a word they have to say, he does enjoy the wild, deep sounds of their voices. Even Horn's voice, compared to other girls, is low and soothing, even as she aggressively argues with Sero about who the fuck knows.

“Hey dipshits! You prepared for the test tomorrow then? Since you're not bothering to study?”

Four pairs of eyes turn towards him so fast he can hear their spines creak.

“What test?!”

“On WHAT?”

“Holy Toledo, there’s no way! How’d that sneak up on us!? Come on man, I swear I was paying attention and I didn’t hear ‘nothing about no test!”

Katsuki looks around the common area and finds the one person who will help him out with this.

“Hey Earphones!”

Jiro’s swivel his way is good enough indication that she’s listening for him.

“The Morse Code Test is tomorrow morning, right? 8:30?”

Absolute bullshit, but this was important, and the losers needed to learn it. Jiro’s eyebrows shoot up into her hairline as she stares him dead in the eye.

“I thought Aizawa said 8:00.”

Ha! She was getting a meal the next time he cooked.

Kaminari’s moan is beautiful to his ears.

“Seriously, how did we all miss this?” Sero mutters darkly. Kirishima looks particularly panicked as he flips open his book to the wrong

section of their texts.

“What’s Morse Code again?” the redhead asks, voice breathy with frayed nerves.

“Oh, my poor Kiri,” Ashido patted him on the shoulder, as if she herself didn’t spend most of class planning a dance routine, instead of zoning in and out of the lesson. “We literally talked about it for like an hour today!”

“But it’s like... tapping, right?” Kirishima wailed. “Who uses tapping?!”

Katsuki rolls his eyes as he taps uses off on the tips of his fingers.

“Radio signals, victims being held hostage who can’t speak, emergency situations like making vibrations in the earth by those trapped underground in a cave in, and its not just tapping, lights can also be used in signaling Morse Code by flashing them from a distance so it’s great for long distances during power outages or across long expanses of water...”

“Okay,” Kirishima breathed out. “Okay, okay... important stuff, I get it.”

“Majorly fucking important dipshit, now pay attention, especially you Sparky.”

“Me? Why me?”

“Because you can use your lightning as Morse Code,” Katsuki told him, tapping the paper more harshly than he needed to.

Honestly, these guys were hopeless.

Kaminari's eyes lit up with more interest than he'd had before, so the trouble of getting them to study was worth it just for that. The idiots. All information was important, but these losers only saw it as valuable if they thought they could implement it specifically with their quirks.

Quirks only would get them so far though.

Not like Aizawa hadn't tried to imprint that lesson into their membranes or anything.

"It's made up of taps and pauses, you got that? You can use anything that can be physically seen or heard. The most important bit is making sure the other person or group is aware that you are communicating in some manner."

"I wasn't aware you had any skill in communication," Kaminari joked.

Katsuki's hands lit up with mini explosions.

"I'm great at communicating my aggression, want to see those skills?"

"Nope! I'm good. You're very talented."

"I fucking thought so."

Ashido and Sero and Kaminari drag Kirishima into this. He knows because when they burst into his room in the middle of the night with treats Sato made and video game disks from Ashido the guy has a sheepish expression and looks resigned. They flick on the lights and are yelling about how it's Friday night, how Blasty needs to have fun in his life and live a little.

Katsuki is on his feet and frantically grabbing at his phone, pressing the power button as they try to rouse him from dead sleep. 11:46 glares up at him as if announcing the count down to an atomic bomb. He swallows and curses and this seems to cause Ashido to snicker,

making a comment about how he should be better at adjusting, more flexible to situations if he really wanted to be a hero.

“Get out,” he croaks, his mouthguard is still in. He pulls it out and drops it on the bed and now Kaminari is pointing and snickering.

“How unexpected, do you have cucumbers and a face mask around here too?”

Ashido and Sero are settling in directly in front of his computer screen and his supposed fucking best friend is just standing by the door, eyeing him nervously because he fucking knows better. He fucking knows Katsuki hates when his boundaries are crossed and this is leaping over it like the fucking unicorns of stupid dumbfucks they are.

“Get out!” He roars this time. “Who the fuck do you think you are?”

“Stop blowing steam,” Sero tells him, waving some fighting game around. “Take a chill pill for once. Its Saturday tomorrow. It won’t kill you to sleep in for once.”

11:50.

Was there any point that the Doctor had activated it early? He’s pretty sure its always been at exactly midnight. Hadn’t it?

“I’m not kidding around. Pack up your shit and get out. I’m not dealing with you guys tonight,” he growls, gesturing towards the door.

“That’s too bad, Blasty, cause we’re staying right here,” Ashido sing songs.

11:51

Kirishima knows what’s up a second before it actual happens. Katsuki grabs the PlayStation 4 off the floor and hurls it through his open door. Sero curses and Kaminari stares in shock as Kirishima tries to grab it out of thin air and there’s an audible crack. Ashido screams in indignation and rage.

There’s a bit of a tussle.

Ashido pushes him into his wall and Kaminari is calling him a douchebag. And time is ticking, ticking away.

11:53

11:55

Sero's shoulders are slumped and he's giving Katsuki a look of disappointment, leaving silently. There's something about it that leaves a lump in his throat, but he can't. He fucking can't right now.

They never fucking listen to him. Ashido has tears in her eyes that she's swiping at angrily and Kaminari is giving him dirty looks.

They pack up and go though.

And Kirishima is looking at him in, yes, fucking disappointment, but also with bewilderment and... concern. Which is probably worse than any of the others. Because fuck, man. What the hell is he supposed to do? He doesn't know.

He slams the door in their faces, leaning against it heavily and glancing at his phone.

11:58

Shit.

He took his medicine half an hour ago and he can feel the side effects he's normally asleep for taking hold. The room is not quite right. Tilted in an unnatural way. In a way that makes him want to vomit. He needs to shove his mouth guard in and get on the bed before he...

His hands glide across the bed before he falls to his knees and looks beneath it.

Its not here.

Where it is? Damn it. He doesn't have time for this. He gets on the bed and his world twists, he tilts and his shoulder hits the wall in his disorientation. And then it hits. Hard and fast as always like a switch and he's not prepared.

Tears well up and he doesn't have his music. He hadn't been able to put his headphones in to distract him from all of his. Can't reach for them now. The lights are fucking on and he can see. He can fucking see his hands taking on a frightening bruised looking color and they hurt. Fuck.

Katsuki curls into a ball.

He's used to being able to clench his teeth against the pain.

Now that he can't, he finds his jaw and teeth clicking together harshly as he tries to remind himself he can't grit. He tries to keep his mouth open, but the pain is wracking itself down his body and along all of his bones, right into every nerve and shit...

There's blood spilling out against his cheek.

Fuuuuuck.

He bit the tip of his tongue off.

There's a moment of panic. People can die from that, can't they? Through the pain, he forces himself to feel how much and... breathes in as he realizes it really is just the tip. It's only the tip. That can... grow back, right?

He spits the blood out so he doesn't choke. Its going to suck to clean up tomorrow but whatever. The blood keeps coming for awhile. He needs to put ice on it, but he can't move yet. Without his music, he can't tell how long its been or how much longer is needed.

Stupid fucking Horns.

Stupid Sero with his stupid face.

Stupid Duncface.

And fucking Kirishima. That fucking guy. Over and over and over again he's warned them off of this shit. He's told them not to wake him up for this stupid shit. He's told them he's not interested in their late-night fooling around. He's told them and told them and told them.

Hot tears slide down his face.

It's four-o'clock in the morning and he's finally recovered enough to sit up. There's dried blood covering his teeth, down his chin and neck and into his shirt. He checks all the crevices around his room for his mouth guard and there's still nothing.

Which means one of those bastards thought it would be funny to take

it.

There's white hot rage building in this chest now.

They know him enough to know that he wouldn't use it if he didn't need it.

They know.

Kirishima is right next door to him, but Katsuki knows that the red head would never swipe his shit like that. So he passes him up. He also decides to pass up Sero and Kaminari floor further down, because those shit faced assholes aren't the ring leader of this thing. Maybe one of them grabbed it, but Horns is the target on this night because she's the one that wanted to do this shit and if he wants their late night visits and requests to stop then he has to target her.

Its dead silent as he takes the elevator.

No one is up except for him. Even the late night idiots who ruin a productive schedule by being up all night know better than to stay up this late. When he makes it to Ashido's door, he doesn't hesitate. He BANGS on it until he hears her moving and only then steps back.

Her hair is rumpled and wild when she swings the door open, a grumpy, sour expression on her face and mouth opening with every intention of yelling at the person on the other side, but when she catches sight of Katsuki she pauses and stares.

And then she screams.

And because this is an academy for heroes, he can already hear people on this floor getting out of bed.

" 'ere es' my mou' guard," he slurs.

"What?" Ashido says shakily. "We need to get you to..."

"Where," Katsuki tries to be more clear, his anger growing. "WHERE. Is. My. Mou.' Piece?" He points to his mouth to make his demand perfectly clear. "You. Took. It."

"I didn't... we didn't... know. What happened?" Ashido stumbles shakily.

"Oh my God," Jiro whispers.

"I 'ust want eh back," Katsuki hisses, as much as he can anyways.

"I... Kaminari has it. I'm so sorry."

"You're. NOT." He grits out, stabbing a finger at her. "You. Know!"

Hagakure, Yaoyorozu, and Uraraka are now crowding the hall too.

"No! We never would have done that if we'd known you needed it this badly," Ashido tries to defend herself and honestly it just pisses him off.

"Bakugou!" Yaoyorozu calls out, she looks pale, but straight backed as she moves forward. "We need to get you to Recovery Girl!"

Katsuki sticks his tongue out, he hears Uraraka gasp as he moves it up and down.

"I. Bit. The. Tip. Off." He says it slowly, making sure they can all understand him. "I. Just. Need. Ice."

He turns back to Ashido, flipping her off before marching back towards the elevator. He's made his point perfectly fucking clear. There will be no more late night visits. None of the girls move, too stunned.

When he makes it in front of Kaminari's door, he doesn't knock. The fucker always leaves his door unlocked for some reason, so he swings it open and flips on the light.

"Duuuuuuuude, what the fuck?" Kaminari mutters, he blinks at Katsuki for a second before jerking awake and sitting up in his bed. "What the fuck?!"

Katsuki glowers, leaning far enough into Kaminari's face that their noses almost touch.

"Where. Is. My. Mou.' Guard?"

It still slurs the tiniest bit, but he doesn't have to repeat himself, because Kaminari's eyes have widened drastically and dunceface automatically looks over at his desk, where the blue, heavily padded mouth piece sits on a napkin.

Katsuki swipes it up, glaring daggers at him before heading towards the door.

“WAIT! Wait! Stop.” Kaminari stumbles out of bed, hitting the door frame as he throws himself out into the hall after Katsuki. “I put cracked red pepper in the lining! I was going to put it back on your desk and... its was a stupid joke. I’m sorry!”

He sends Kaminari a death glare.

“Fuckin’ ‘eriously?” He glowers.

He makes it to his room just as Sero is opening his door, rubbing his eyes and blinking out at him.

“Wha...?”

Katsuki slams his door shut.

Point Fucking Made.

He’s exhausted now and wishes he’d spent his time going to get ice instead of being a prick. There’s only a tiny part of him that’s glowing with satisfaction at teaching them a lesson. The other ninety percent of him just wants to sleep. So he thoroughly rinses his sleeping guard and shoves it into his mouth, not even caring that theirs still a tiny bit of spice still left.

The world is still tilting and he doesn’t fight it. He tilts with it, falling more than anything onto the bed. Rest, actual rest, takes him a few moments later.

They don’t talk about it.

Not really.

Not about the Playstation 4 or about the Mouth Guard or about the fact that Katsuki bit part of his tongue off. Katsuki stays in his room for the rest of the weekend and no one bothers him. He makes himself some tea in the kitchen and no one talks to him. When its finally over, he can’t exactly lie and say that it doesn’t bother him a little bit.

The silence.

The isolation.

It’s the consequences of his actions though and he takes it in stride. At least this way, he tells himself, no one will find out. They can hate him, but at least they won’t pity him. They can glare at him, but at

least they won't be trying to uncover the truth and possibly getting him killed. It's better this way.

He doesn't talk during class. He's silent despite the fact that he can practically feel the entirety of the class's eyes on him. He ignores it. It will pass. His tongue will heal. Everyone will forget about what happened in the hall, well, everyone but the 'Bakusquad.' That's fine.

When Katsuki sits down to eat lunch, at a different table than normal, he finds that it's quickly crowded by all four of the idiots. Kaminari puts a hot peppermint tea down by Katsuki's lunch, his personal favorite. Ashido and Sero are arguing about something or other and Kirishima nudges him gently as he sits down too close for being simply humoring.

He lets out a breath that he hadn't been aware he was holding.

He's been forgiven.

Katsuki looks up to see Ashido giving him a hesitant smile. He doesn't smile back, but he nods slowly, keeping eye contact with her. She loses the stiffness and her grin is huge. She sounds warmer as she turns back to the conversation-argument.

And he's forgiven in turn, he supposes. Not that he was really genuinely angry with them long term. He'd gotten over their stunt by that afternoon, but he wouldn't tell them that. No need to encourage stupidity, after all. Katsuki smiles into his curry where no one can see it.

His mom calls him up one evening. Someone's snitched on him for something. His mom isn't one to call for idle chit chat yet she's not saying what she wants or needs right off the bat. No demand to visit them.

She's asking about classes. It's weirding him the fuck out. She's prodding at him. Trying to get something. She's not being blunt and it's throwing him off.

"And the dorms? How are you settling in?"

Katsuki takes the phone from his ear to stare at it in disbelief.

“Okay, what’s really going on?”

‘What do you know?’

“Listen brat, don’t go getting your knickers in a twist, but I heard you haven’t been adjusting too well.”

“Yeah?”

‘Who the fuck’s been talking about me?’

His mom can translate him like no other.

“Don’t take that tone. They were worried.”

“Can’t speak to my face then?”

“You don’t make that easy.”

Katsuki rubs at the bridge of his nose in agitation.

“So they decided you were the best bet?”

The jibe is meant to piss her off. To get her yelling. To distract her from what he wants... needs to hide. He hears her growl deep in her throat. She’s moving things around in the kitchen, slamming things down, picking them up, aggressively taking things from shelves.

She’s breathing hard when she comes back to the phone and Katsuki can’t help but be impressed because whatever she’d wanted to say had been forcibly taken out on the dishes instead of him in a verbal lashing.

“Don’t do that. Don’t fucking do that,” she snarls at him. She knows him too well. “Don’t purposefully piss me off, brat, I don’t want to be a bad mother.”

Katsuki fidgets, but he only feels a little guilty. He knows there’s been a few times where she’s really lost her shit on him and said some awful things. When dad was forced to go to therapy for his suicide attempt when Katsuki was ten, mom had signed up right alongside her husband.

She’d blamed herself for her husband’s actions.

And, she’d admitted much later, she was aware that the longer Masaru’s treatments went on the more frustration and anger she felt

and that Katsuki had taken the brunt of that.

They'd made a deal then, outside of dad's hospital room at two or so in the morning, that he would let her know when she went too far or said something too harsh and she in turn would do the same. It was the first time they'd really accepted the idea that Masaru wouldn't be there to do that for them.

They couldn't really stop themselves from losing their shit, but they could stop the purposeful moments when they were trying to upset the other. It was a goal that they each worked at. Not very successfully, it must be noted, but they were trying all the same.

"You're not. I'm not ready to get into it though," Katsuki admitted after a moment. "And I'll fight you tooth and nail if you push it."

His mother inhaled sharply.

"That's not good, brat," she breathed out through her nose.

"I know."

"Do you have someone you're willing to talk to about it?"

"No."

There was a long silence on the other end.

"But I'm not like dad. I'm hashing it out. I fixed things with Deku."

His mom seemed to breathe again.

"Okay. Alright. You've got goals then?" His mom asked.

"Yeah, of course I do. I'm fixing things, just on my own terms. As long as there's breath in my body, I ain't gonna fucking give up. I got everything from you. Everything."

"Damn straight, but... it's alright, if you're a little like your father. You know that, right?"

Katsuki wasn't sure what to say to that.

"It's alright to love cooking and it's alright to love videogames. It's alright to want to be like him."

"I can't afford to be like him."

He wasn't Deku. He couldn't make that shit work. He didn't know how. Had never known how to be gentle or kind or considerate. He was instinct and honesty and forwardness and passion. Stopping to consider every move he makes as he makes it, to overthink every decision and every word is so against his nature and patience. He can't do it.

"Okay. Trouble sleeping?"

"Picked up some sleep aids. Going to bed super early. Got a mouth guard for the nightmares. I'm handling it."

"I can hire a professional for you to talk to."

"Honestly? That would stress me the fuck out. Don't do that."

A professional picking apart what he was saying? Katsuki wasn't good at lying. He'd end up accidentally killing himself within the first month. It was why he hadn't bothered pretending to go along with the villains. Katsuki is not espionage material. He doesn't have a subtle bone in his body and he's well aware of that.

"How about writing things down? Or drawing?" His mother tried.

"Stop it, ya old Hag, I told you, I've got this handled. I just got no poker face, okay? These people freak out if your hair is out of place. I just need time."

"Fine," his mother breathes out in agitation. "Fine. You're so freaking stubborn you stupid brat. No good sense about you at all."

"Goodnight Hag."

"Night, brat."

Kaminari looks depressed and it's pissing him the fuck off. He heard Ashido mention something about his dad canceling another weekend visit with him or some shit like that. It's a weird concept to Katsuki.

He's only gone to visit his parents once since moving into the dorms and he felt like he was invading on some fucked up version of a honeymoon the whole time he was home that weekend. His parents don't miss him at the house and he doesn't really miss them too much either.

Phone calls home are just as rare, mostly to make sure that

everything's still going good with dad and that he hasn't suddenly decided to do something stupid and that he's still going to all of his check ups and whatnot. So Katsuki can't really say he understands. He guesses that Sparky is close to his dad or at least he wants to be.

Katsuki doesn't offer to talk.

That's Kirishima's forte and he would probably fuck it up in some unimaginably horrible way that would somehow upset everyone, not just Kaminari. So he pokes that with a twenty foot pole as far away from himself as he can and sets about cooking that Saturday afternoon when the shithead is supposed to be with his dad but isn't.

He makes Italian because that's easiest to make a lot of. Fettucine pasta with fresh chicken cooked in alfredo and a little Cajun for spice. Slices of fresh bread with garlic butter. A large bowl of salad tossed in ceaser, diced cherry tomatoes, croutons... He sets up the table as he waits for the dunce patrol to come down. He knows by Kirishima's texts that their finishing up their whole 'cheer up Kaminar' seminar and that they're going to be coming down for snacks in a minute.

Sero comes around the corner first. He comes to a halt and blinks in surprise even as Katsuki scowls at him. He turns and begins wildly gesturing, his weirdly shaped mouth stretched even further in something that resembled a shit eating grin. Ashido comes skidding to a halt, partially running into Sero, eagerly taking in what has the guy so excited. When she spots the table, her eyes light up.

"You're not going to believe this!" Ashido calls.

Katsuki huffs, sitting down at the table in irritation as he starts to pile his plate, grabbing a bread and munching on it before anymore of them can come crawling in. He ignores the bundle of satisfaction in his chest when Kaminari trudges around the corner and his eyes widen, a beaming Kirishima tugging him towards the table.

"Bro..." Kirishima breathes as he takes a seat and starts heaping his plate up.

"You did this for me?" Kaminari asks in a small voice.

Katsuki snorts.

"No, you idiot. I did it because you guys are all going to die of malnutrition if you keep eating shit on the weekends. Now sit down and shut up."

No one is fooled and no one is quiet.

They make such a ruckus that Aizawa crawls out of his office space to investigate and Katsuki shoves a plate into his hands without a word. His teacher raises an eyebrow, but loads his plate up, snags a slice of bread and ruffles Katsuki's hair on his way out of the room.

The others know better than to mention that last part to anyone.

Most importantly though, Kaminari no longer looks depressed so he knows he's getting better at this 'relationship' thing. These guys are okay in his book. They seemed to have realized Katsuki doesn't do well with words and they've accepted him regardless.

Its... a nice feeling.

He's not entirely sure how it happens, but he's somehow become part of Deku's training routine now. He's part of their little secret group circle and it feels surreal and right and wrong all at the same time. He's the reason All Might's secret was exposed and yet the hero wanted him here, had invited him here...

He's part of it.

"Something on your mind?" All Might... Toshinori asks.

Katsuki looks up at the man and shrugs. He's just gotten back from another set of remedial courses. Deku is off at his internship. Its just him and the deflated form of his hero. It feels wrong for it to be just the two of them. As if he is betraying the hero just by existing in his breathing space.

Which is fucking stupid.

He knows.

He knows better.

"You seem unsettled?"

Katsuki barks out a laugh.

"I'm always unsettled."

Lately. Anyways. He can't relax. He's tried. He's failed. He's tried again. It's an endless cycle of high stress he can't shake himself out of. Has been since Kamino. Its been eating away at everything that he is.

Toshinori made an unhappy noise in his throat.

"That is unacceptable," the hero rumbles.

Katsuki can't help it, he's snickering because its such an All Might thing to say.

"Yeah?" he chokes out, finally relaxing a marginally bit. "Are you gonna tackle me to the ground until I'm all relaxed and happy then?"

But Toshinori is looking him up and down, gauging him.

"Does sparring relax you?" he asks seriously.

"Depends on who I'm sparring with, I suppose."

"Then you should spar every day. You shouldn't have to live feeling like that and if you have something that helps, then you should endeavor to do it as often as you can," Toshinori lectures him before seeming to realize what he was saying and adding hurriedly. "Under adult supervision, at least."

The whistle on the kettle blows and Toshinori leaps from the couch to pour them tea. They talk about some of the exercises Toshinori wants to try out in future exercises with the class and Katsuki gives him his view on things. Places where the exercise could be tweaked, maybe not so extreme, as the teacher was amped to do, while making other portions harder.

It's a lot of fun. He feels like he's actually being useful here and it's a feeling he hasn't really experienced in a while. Where with Deku it feels like he's just going at it the wrong way, but how else do you go about working with a quirk other than trying to bring it to the surface first?

He also feels like All Might... Toshinori gets him. The man just seems to sort of know what he's trying to say and while his classmates are getting a lot better at understanding him, its nowhere close. He doesn't feel so frustrated when talking to the man and better yet... there's no condescending tone like some many others.

Best Jeanist, judging him before he ever even talked to him.

King Orca seemed about ready to dismiss all of them.

Present Mic's words at the Sports Festival.

Everyone always pointing out what made him bad, what he needed to fix, what he was lacking in. Always lacking. It had begun to wear on him as much as what the villains had to say to him had. That he wasn't meant to be a hero.

And, he guessed, they were partly right, weren't they?

He would never be able to be a hero.

But... he could die acting like one.

"You know..." Katsuki says thoughtfully, eyeing Toshinori up. "I bet you could still take one or two of the class as you are now. Cheer Deku up by winning quirkless."

The retired hero's laugh booms through the whole room.

The liquid is hot. It stings when he tries to open his eyes, a blurry outline all that he can see past the glass. Swaying Nomu. Overweight scrotum looking cunt standing in front of his lab table of fucked up weird shit... is that a head? Cocknose croons at the thing.

His body hurts and he feels dizzy, his head heavy as it tilts to the side, the room twisting in his sight. It's so fucking hot and he wishes someone would crack the glass or open a god damn window. It feels like he's been in a hot tub for way too fucking long. He weakly pulls at the metal holding his hands in place as he feels his eyes begin to roll into the back of his head. He's got no strength left.

Katsuki blinks hard, shrinking back as much as he can as one of the Nomu catch his eye. Black pits staring right at him. Fuck. Fuck. Katsuki cringes as it begins to lumber over, large claw like hands reaching...

Katsuki wakes up with a jerk.

Pain! Fuck. Shit. Ow. His whole body convulses in agony. He must

have fallen asleep during the Doctor's fucked up playtime. It's still running rampant. He closes his eyes, focusing on the fast-paced music tumbling into his ears. Meant to make him feel like time was moving faster than it was. He can't see the clock and can't turn his head to look at it.

He tries to slow his heart down, but it pounds to the beat of the music, rapid and harsh and banging against his chest. He can't feel his fingers or his arms. His bones feel like they are grinding together when he moves. Hip bones grinding against his femur, femur grinding against his knee caps, sternum against his spine, shoulder blade against humerus... every inch of his body lighting up in agony every time he tries to adjust himself, to move his head to breath easier, or even the shivering from a cold sweat.

The nightmares don't help. The face of the fucking Doctor sending his heart beating too fast, his breathing rising out of control. He's having a panic attack because of a nightmare, he realizes, and it's only making everything so much worse.

He's not sure what's worse. The nightmares where he knows he's having a nightmare and can't wake up or when he doesn't realize he's having a nightmare and thinks he's really back with the Doctor.

The song ends.

A few moments of silence makes the sound of his own breathing too loud and pathetic. A new song replaces the sound soon enough and he's listening to a less dramatic song, but the pacing is still fast and it does nothing to calm him down.

When the sun shows and he can feel his fingers enough to turn off the music, Katsuki feels sick. He'd passed out at some point again, this time from a lack of oxygen. Thrown back into hellish nightmares. Waking up to another panic attack. More pain.

An endless horrifying cycle.

And now the night was over. Light spilling into the dorm room, illuminating not a lab but his own room. Blanket. Walls. Desk. Books. Pillow. It's a full-length pillow. Simple and white. Katsuki pulls it to him. Squeezing it in a tight hug. Burying his face into the silky surface.

It's the stupidest urge.

The pillow doesn't feel full enough. There's not enough to grab or hold onto and it's not warm. It's wet from his sweat. It's silky part partially damp and cold. He feels utterly alone in this room, surrounded by four walls that can't see him.

Katsuki wants...

A person. He wants to grab onto someone's arm and hold onto it. He wants to wrap someone up in a hug and not let go. He wants to feel warm skin against him. He doesn't... he doesn't want to be alone.

It's a familiar feeling.

Long nights alone in an empty house waiting for a phone call or a car to show up in the driveway. Sitting in a hospital chair and being told he can stay but he can't touch his dad because it would hurt him. His mom, coming home in a rush, but grabbing a new set of clothes, packing a new bag. Telling Katsuki that she's sorry but that he'll "have to be a big boy for her a little while longer. You're doing so well on your own. The neighbors will come check on him, as always.' Leaving without a hug or a kiss, without any contact at all.

He'd spent a long time convincing himself he didn't need it. That he was stronger than that. He was a big kid and he didn't need anyone to hold him or hug him or anything stupid like that.

Now all he wants to do is grab hold of the first person he comes in contact with and not let go. He breathes through his nose, squeezing the pillow so tight that its flattened against his chest. And it's not enough.

The ache in his bones goes away, but the ache in his heart continues on without his fucking consent. His emotions. His own actions. His own decisions. His will to move forward no matter how bad things get...

Those are the only things he can control right now and it feels like none of those things are willing to bend to his wishes. To forge themselves into the sword of steel he wants them to be. Instead, it feels like he's holding a handle of straw, the length of the sword made of flimsy wood that bends at the touch. A child's plaything instead of a warrior's weapon.

There's a knock on his door.

"We're heading out in twenty, Bakugou!" Kirishima calls cheerfully.

Katsuki doesn't 'get out of bed,' he rolls. His feet barely under him as he lands on the floor, not like a cat, but like a dog that's been pushed. He sways on his feet and knows without anyone having to tell him, that today is going to be a clusterfuck.

He dresses half-hazardly, not at all in the pristine if not complete uniform he's known for. Because fuck ties. He doesn't need anything else around his neck in this lifetime. The last time he'd worn one was when Kirishima had brought suits to I-Island for the party and he'd regretted that decision the whole fucking night. Never fucking again. He should shower, but he doesn't have time.

He compromises by thoroughly washing his face, covering the dark circles with a touch of makeup he normally uses while wearing his mask. Putting on the school jacket is actually painful and he realizes that it must have gone on a lot longer last night than normal because it's not usually this bad.

What the fuck ever.

He'll deal.

Not like he has a choice.

Another knock comes at his door.

Katsuki resists the urge to whine. The sound burgeoning in his throat. He grabs a bottle of water and forcing the noise down, down, down deep where it can't escape. Where it will never get out.

Then he slings his bag over his shoulder and opens his door.

Kirishima is there, easy smile that slips just a little bit when he sees him. Katsuki straightens his shoulder and takes another deep breath. The urge is back. Like a haunting spasm that runs down his spine and along his arms.

He wants to reach out.

His mouth does a weird spasm that he controls by biting down hard on his cheeks and clenching his jaw. He moves into the hallway and they start on their way to class. He's far too aware of how close they are and how easy it would be. Physically anyways.

The humiliation and shame of asking for a hug might just cause him to have a heart attack. He can't do it. The idea of sounding like a needy little bitch with issues is as appealing as trying to eat Ashido's cooking.

"Sleep well?" Kishima asks lightly, but the motherfucker is side eyeing him.

There's no use in lying so Katsuki shrugs.

He feels cold and hurts everywhere and he wants to crawl back into bed and he just... wants. And it sickens him. He thought he'd cut off this needy part of him when he was a kid. But its back with a

vengeance. Trying to convince him that Kirishima won't hold it against him or mention it to anyone if he asks.

And if he asked Kishima not to tell anyone specifically then that shit would go to the guy's grave...

Katsuki digs his nails into his arm to stop that thought in its tracks. He steps a bit further from his best friend, keeping two feet between them. Kirishima's forehead wrinkles and he looks about to say something when a door closes. Shoji stumbles out of his own bedroom, stretching his multiple limbs, what sounds like satisfying pops coming from his joints as he falls into step a few feet behind them.

He doesn't need this, he tells himself over and over again, he doesn't need it.

Handbook of the Damned

Chapter Summary

The chapter in which Katsuki has an anxiety attack and he and Deku somehow get along a little better than before and the enemy sends a message

Chapter 3: Handbook for the Damned

Katsuki is strong. He's a god damn Ox. He is a stubborn, overwhelming force of propulsion and fire. He is... fucking exhausted. What the actual fuck. His body feels like led. He is about to drop and this training session is an actual nightmare concocted out of Aizawa sensei's cunt ass handbook for the damned.

"Bakugou, are you alright?" Yaoyorozu asks.

"Peachy," he mutters darkly as he forces his body over another pipe in Ground Gama.

The industrial labyrinth has been set up with an array of 'bombs' teams of two need to disarm. This little exercise would be a walk in the park, except that the Doctor's little psycho house of fun time had lasted for forty-five fucking songs last night. The early morning sun stretched over the horizon, a definite change of pace since hero coursework was always done in the afternoons, but All fucking Might, in all his golden ass glory, decided that they'd all best switch things up.

Thank fuck for that, motherfucker.

No time to recover what so fucking ever from last night.

This sucked ass, hard core.

So fucking hard core.

He pulled himself over the last of the pipes to stand beside the creation quirk user. Yaoyorozu's face was tinted a heavy red and she was doing everything in her power to avoid his eye.

"What?!"

“Um... its just... you’re muttering like Midoriya and its very... colorful.”

“Fuck!?”

That was so fucking dangerous. Jesus Christ. Was he looking to accidentally kill himself? He’d have to be careful. It must be the sleep deprivation or the exhaustion. He was losing his mind today.

“Let’s just go.”

“Are you sure everything is okay? We can rest. Everyone has an off day. There’s no need to...”

He shoots her a glare and she sighs. She does not get all mopey about it though, like she had when they first met what feels like a lifetime ago. The class knows him enough now. They’ve all been through a shitstorm of incidents and have powered through together. He’s worked with them enough that they get a lot of the little things he does and that he never really means anything personal (unless he fucking says it out right, then he’s getting personal because someone pissed him the fuck off and is gonna pay).

Bakugou takes off at a run. As long as he keeps moving he can ignore the ache in his body. Screw morning routines. He used to love mornings. Get up. Get a nice run in. A good sweat before a nice relaxing shower to get the day started off right. A cup of tea.

Now there’s only paralysis and lingering pain and stiffness and stress.

There is a resolve in his heart too. That should he ever get near the Doctor, he’s going to put every drop of sweat and pain into his palms and he’s going to blast him until theirs only ashes left.

He’d be the villain the Doctor wanted so fucking much by blowing his head right off of his smug fucking shoulder’s. Hero or not.

The Liquid is hot. His arms won’t move from the anti-quirk shackles and he feels like he’s suffocating on the tube running down his throat. The liquid, that’s not water, definitely not fucking water, glides over his skin too much like the Sludge Villain that attacked him not even a year ago.

It's familiar and strange in equal measures and Katsuki finds no matter how much he screams or kicks he can't get free. His feet slide against glass, he feels like he's in an inferno, but he isn't burning. There's no fire.

Just heat.

His skin is being seared he...

Katsuki sits up in bed. Gasping as he feels the cool breeze from his open window hitting his face. He turns over, exhausted and his body aching from the Quirimorbus. He must have fallen asleep somehow... his music is dead. The IPOD drained of its battery. He spends way too long breathing in and out, trying to steady himself. Quell the panic in his heart.

His skin is no longer searing.

In fact, he feels really cold. There's sweat slicking every inch of his skin, but he shivers as he pulls his blanket closer to him. His phone tells him he'll need to start getting ready for class in forty minutes and honestly? There's never been a day where he wants to say 'fuck it' so bad and curl into a ball and go back to sleep where no one can bother him.

Today is that day.

He doesn't give in to that thought though, because that thought is beneath him. He's not some elementary school brat whose dad just tried to off himself and he's not some middle school punk who can't handle the fact that he scares his dad and that his family wishes Katsuki wasn't part of the family.

He's a hero in training.

So he gets his ass up out of bed and tries to make himself not look like a corpse come to life. Tries to cover up the bags under his eyes, tries

to pretend like his belt isn't tightening one hole more than it had last month and makes a note to try not to skip lunch again today.

He's a hero in training and this won't beat him.

'Deku, you bastard.'

He's left Katsuki with the child. Abandoned her on the couch to go get the face in walls, third year weirdo. Mirio something or other. Whatever, the point is that everyone thinks Deku's so fucking great and yet Katsuki knows the truth. Deku's secretly laughing at all of them with a nature more savage than himself.

"Hi."

Katsuki glances at her ridiculously large eyes, twitching a bit. Doesn't anyone understand he can't do this kind of thing? Its like everyone and their mother wants to force him to be around children and act nice to them. There are certain things he's good at and certain things he's not. Eri? Or whatever, she's looking down now at her lap, his lips pressed together looking about ready to cry. What had he done? Shit.

"Hi," he repeats back, hoping for mercy that it will be enough.

"Are you Izuku's friend?" she asks.

Apparently Mercy died in a back ally.

"No."

"Oh. Then..."

She doesn't continue. Katsuki sighs in relief, moving over towards the window to get some fresh air. Its jammed and he has to force it open. It's winter and the breeze that comes through is chilling, but it lets him breathe, lets the anxiety not feel quite so suffocating.

"Is he your classmate?"

"Yeah."

"But you're not friends."

Katsuki bangs his head against the window sill.

“Deku’s more like an annoying little shit of brother than anything,” Katsuki finally says in exasperation. “Does that answer your...”

A ‘BANG’ sounds from the door. Katsuki whirls in time to see Deku staring at him with eyes far too wide and his bag on the ground. The tall blonde third year beside him grinning in Katsuki’s direction.

‘Fuuuuuuuck. Fuck. Fuck. Damn it.’

“Don’t you go getting the wrong fucking idea, DEKU!” Katsuki snarls. He rams into the stunned little shit’s shoulder and stomps out the door, muttering darkly under his breath, before adding. “AND I’M NOT YOUR FUCKING BABYSITTER SO DON’T LEAVE ME WITH HER AGAIN!”

Kacchan is... just as difficult to decipher as he’s always been. Izuku’s mind is a million miles away as the words replay in his head on repeat.

“Is he your classmate?”

“Yeah.”

“But you’re not friends.”

A stab had gone through his heart. He knows that their fight hadn’t fixed things. Not by a long shot. When Kacchan had offered to help him with the new quirk and train with him though... when he’d started hanging out with him and All Might, discussing different matters and coming up with plans, well, he’d hoped that Kacchan had seen them on the road to being friends again... someday. To hear him deny it outright though...

“Deku’s more like an annoying little shit of a brother than anything.”

It was clear Kacchan hadn’t wanted him to hear that. Izuku said fair well to Eri and Mirio and wandered outside to think. Overthink, as Kacchan would tell him. Did Kacchan really think of him as some sort of a brother?

“What’s with that smile?”

Izuku turns to see Tokoyami standing nearby, leaning against a tree with a book open in his hands. His eyebrow is quirked and the book leans forward before snapping closed as the shadow user moves closer. Izuku touches his face and realizes that he really is smiling. He shrugs, looking down at the ground.

“Ah, its nothing, just...” Izuku shrugs again, but he can feel his face is stretched to the max. “Just learned something unexpected is all.”

Tokoyami hums deep in his throat.

I am unprepared for this upcoming test,” Tokoyami admits, holding up their math textbook. “I don’t suppose you’d be willing to...”

“Of course! Where have you gotten stuck?”

“The equations and formulas are fine, but when we add in the angles and how to determine how it relates to graphs...” Tokoyami’s deep baritone turns embarrassed and the taller boy shrugs. Izuku smiles fondly and gestures for him to follow to a bench nearby. For someone who had such a dark persona, Tokoyami was probably one of the gentlest people he’d ever met.

They sat talking about homework for the rest of the afternoon.

Kirishima watched Bakugou begin to pack up without a word. The clock read a little after 8:30 p.m. Bakugou had opted out of the last board game, watching them as he put in some last minute studying. They knew better than to say anything by this point. Still...

He met Kaminari’s eyes from across the table, golden orbs rolling in exasperation. Sero shrugged and Ashido seemed fully focused on her dice roll. Kirishima stretched out the kinks in his back, standing up himself.

“You’re not going to bed too, are you?” Kaminari asked, wrinkling his nose.

“Of course not,” Kirishima waved, “but these floors are hella hard on the knees and if I’m going to keep playing then I want a blanket.”

Sero’s cool black eyes watched him carefully, glancing over at Bakugou before tilting his head in question. Kirishima shrugged,

neither confirming nor denying his friends suspicions. They all had their own tactics when it came to cracking Bakugou's walls. It had been partly a game, a challenge, when they first started school.

Now...

Well, now they'd gotten a glimpse of the person underneath and they'd all learned a thing or two about how awesome of a person Bakugou really was. They'd learned to trust him and to care about him and they knew the stubborn guy cared about all of them too.

Kirishima threw his arm around the blonde, grinning wildly as he was scowled at.

"Care to escort this poor soul to the upper levels," Kirishima asked, going for suave.

"Stop hanging on me, you dumbass, do I look like a god damn bench?"

"Well, you sure do get shit on a lot!" Kaminari called.

Ashido and Sero cracked up even as the air filled with malice.

"I'll kill you."

"I'd like to see you..." A textbook hit Kaminari in the forehead, Kirishima's head whipped around to where Bakugou's hand was out stretched, shocked in the fact that he hadn't even seen the throw. Hadn't even felt Bakugou's body move under him it was so quick. Kaminari was screaming obscenities, clutching at his forehead.

"Copy the notes in that textbook you loser, unless you want to fail the test on Tuesday. I expect that book back on my desk tomorrow morning."

"Thank you, Blasty!" Ashido called over Kaminari's wailing, already picking the book up and popping it open to the papers inside.

"Tch."

Bakugou turned and Kirishima, still very much attached to the ash blonde, moved with him.

"You're just... so full of love. It's so manly, Baku-bro," Kirishima teased.

“I will end you right here, right now, if you don’t shut that gob of yours.”

Kirishima snickered, but complied. They rode the elevator in silence and he watched as his friend absently pulled his keys from his pocket to unlock his door. Bakugou was the only one who locked his room up every single day.

“Hey,” Bakugou looked up at Kirishima’s call, tilting his head for him to go on. “I know you’re like... top three, but if you ever have a subject you’re struggling with, you know you can talk to me or one of the others, right? Or about anything at all really. We’re here for you man.”

He sees Bakugou open up his mouth, face twisted in something that is decidedly unhappy, before it snaps shut. His lips tighten until its one thin line across his face. The hand around the door nob clenches and unclenches. Shoulder’s that had been relaxed a second ago are rigid pillars.

“I know,” Bakugou grits out.

His door opens too fast and there’s a ‘bang’ as it shuts. Kirishima isn’t sure what he said that had upset him, but now there’s a well of guilt in the pit of his stomach. That had been the exact opposite of his intentions.

Bakugou never reached out to anyone for anything.

Yet Kirishima watched as the guy put himself out there for people like himself with his self-esteem, and Kaminari with his dad, or Jiro with the band. Bakugou had worked hard to do better at team exercises and had even cooperated with Todoroki in the remedial courses. He’d paid Kirishima back for the goggles and had been going out of his way to help their group with classes.

His best friend was fighting himself over something. Never allowing himself to relax. Bakugou always seemed to be balancing himself on the point of a knife. All Kirishima had wanted to do was to let him know that he didn’t have to do everything by himself. He didn’t have to put so much stress on himself proving to all of them that he wasn’t...

It had to be what the villains had said to him. All this effort, relentlessly working to show people he wasn’t a bad guy when they already knew. How could they not? Bakugou was rough around the

edges but everyone in class knew he was a good person. Everyone it seemed, but Bakugou.

Kirishima sighed heavily, going to go grab his blanket. When he made it back downstairs and met the others, all he could do was shrug helplessly.

“Do you think his nightmares are still bad?” Ashido asked, low and terse, looking over at the elevator.

“Well,” Sero said thoughtfully, “would he still be going to bed so early and getting up so late if they weren’t?”

Silence greeted that answer.

They’d all come to the conclusion that they must have interrupted a really bad nightmare the night they’d barged in. They’d been too pissed and confused at first to realize what they’d done, but when they’d sat and talked about it, it had all been rather obvious.

Bakugou had been terrified when they’d come in. He had been shaking and panicked and they’d been too obsessed with their own plans and intentions to notice until Bakugou had lost it on Ashido’s playstation.

And they’d caused him to bite the tip of his tongue off.

Even after Recovery Girl had healed the damage, Bakugou had refrained from talking much that week of school. When they’d sat down at his table, the guy looked like a cornered animal, like he expected them to stab at him or worse.

“I wish he’d talked to at least one of us about it,” Kirishima muttered. “It doesn’t seem to be getting better for him at all.”

Sero shrugged.

“You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.”

There were murmurs of agreement around the group.

“We just...” Ashido looked up from the meticulously written notes, looking them all in the eye. “We just need to make sure that we’re not going to turn our backs on him if he messes up.”

“Well said!” Kirishima fist-bumped her, turning his own attention to the board. “Now, I believe it’s my turn to dazzle.”

“So manly,” Ashido whispered.

“Today you’ll be working through a series of scenarios using past villains quirks and possible solutions.” Midnight handed out a packet of papers. Each one with a villain and a crime they are ‘in the process of’ committing. “You have four teachers. Four quirks to deal with when you are in training. If you become Pro-Heroes, this will not be the case. Each day you go out will be a different person with an individual quirk. Each day will be radically different in how you handle the situation at hand and the results you wish to obtain.”

Katsuki glanced over at Jiro, noting that she had a completely different set of profiles and situations than he did. Midnight had really gone out of her way for this project. This must have been a pain to prepare.

“History,” Midnight said, pausing for dramatic effect. Katsuki hid a smirk at her excitement. “History is the best possible teacher. It is endless in what it can teach us about the future. Ignoring it,” she hit Kaminari’s desk, who looked as if he was daydreaming. A small spark of electricity came off of him, lighting up his startled expression, making the class laugh. “Is to err on the side of stupidity.”

More snickering.

Katsuki flipped through the profiles, but his mind wandered to his own situation. A man who could kill him in an instant. From any distance. At any time. No ability to gather intel on him. No ability to gather allies because of his little fucking assistant.

It would require trust, he realized.

People who trusted him so implicitly that they would be willing to come and fight and work with him without knowing the plan or details or who they were up against. Katsuki pulled one of his papers to him, writing a list of people that would work with. Kirishima, obviously, but he could probably convince Sero, Kaminari, Ashido and even Deku... He scratched the nerd's name out. Then, after thinking about it a little longer, he scratched all their names out.

He couldn’t ask that.

The Doctor was fucking dangerous.

He needed experienced Pro-Heroes.

Unfortunately, the only one that came to mind who would trust him like that was All Might. Which was not going to happen since the retired hero's body was so damaged. Aizawa might and...

And he could stop the Doctor's quirk from a distance.

Best Jeanist could immobilize him, though getting that pompous jackass to help would be a struggle. Katsuki could be the bait. Luring the Doctor out with promises of changing sides, but what if the Doctor brought the League? Fuck.

It had taken an extensive group of heroes to take on those bastards.

Katsuki tapped his pen on the paper absently.

Once again he would be bringing a battalion of heroes to his aide to protect him. A bitter taste filled his mouth. Was he always going to be a fucking burden? Needing to be rescued at every turn. The thought made him feel sick, but he couldn't think of any other way out of this situation...

He sketched it out, briefly, what sort of heroes would be needed against such an extensive group. How he would get in contact with the Doctor was another matter entirely. He assumed at some point the man would believe he was ready and reach out to him. He would think Katsuki was broken enough, desperate enough to make it all stop.

If that were the case then they would be fighting on the Doctor's terms.

Not good.

Was there a way to make a demand? No, that would be too obvious. If the Doctor suspected for even a second a plan of attack against him, he wouldn't show up and he'd kill Katsuki with a snap of his god damn fingers. He crossed that idea out.

He needed...

"Which scenario are you concentrating so hard on, Bakugou?" Midnight asked. She plucked the paper out of his hands. The chair fell back in his haste to stand. Midnight made to look down at the paper in her hand, but Katsuki got there first.

It was instinct and panic melded into one fast movement.

His hands exploded outwards, the paper was incinerated, and Midnight screamed in surprise. Stepping back, her fingers burned, staring in shock at him. Katsuki couldn't breathe. His knees buckled and he found himself crouched on the ground, clutching at his chest in sheer terror.

So fucking stupid.

He'd written the god damn names on the paper!

If she'd seen... he took deep breaths. Too deep. He was hyperventilating, but couldn't stop himself. Did he fuck up? Was he going to die? He waited. Waited. Waited. He ignored Deku sitting next to him, speaking in a harried, frantic voice. He ignored Midnight. He ignored Kirishima.

Was he going to die?

Nothing was happening.

Did he get the paper in time then? Stopped her from seeing the names? Fuck. He hadn't even been thinking about it. He wrote the name down. He should be dead. Was it about intentions? He never would have shown those papers to anyone so did it mean he had to write with the intentions to pass the words on?

Fuck. Fuckity fuck. Fuck.

Eventually, the panic gave way and he could hear what the others were saying.

"...on her way?"

...

"No, I've never seen him have a panic attack."

...

"What the hell triggered it?"

"It could have been anything," Midnight's voice said, but there was something off about it, like she had a suspicion that she knew exactly what had set him off. "Bakugou, drink this water for me, if you can?"

He shakily grabbed the bottle, jerking it back and feeling some of it slide down his chin. There was no possible way to explain this, was there? Damn it. He looked up to see Kirishima eyeing him with the stupid worried puppy dog face he'd clearly mastered the fuck out of. When he caught Katsuki's eye, he offered his hand.

Katsuki took it, standing on unstable legs.

"Had us worried there, man."

"Fine," Bakugou swallows back the dryness in his throat. "I'm fine."

He turns to the front, eyeing Midnight, who is calmly instructing Iida how to properly wrap her fingers. He's stiff as he catches sight of the angry red there, but when Midnight cocks her head in his direction, eyes calculating, there's a complete lack of anger or accusation.

"There's half an hour left of class, why don't you go outside for some fresh air." She gestures to the papers Katsuki didn't burn to shit. "I trust you to finish those papers and return them to me tomorrow?"

He nodded, opening his mouth to apologize before his jaw clicks shut.

Kirishima's eyes are too wide as they watch him and he clicks his tongue in annoyance, eyes cast downwards so he doesn't have to see everyone's reactions. He heads out the door because a run really is the thing he needs to clear his head.

He's not dead.

He feels like he's breathing through a tube, but he's breathing. He probably shouldn't, but his feet stumble under him until he's at a run. He's hitting objects on his way, tree branches and bushes and part of a bench, but he hardly notices.

He burned his teacher's hands.

Shit.

He trips and his knees hit the dirt hard, but he doesn't get up. He focuses on trying to get his breathing under control and is unsurprised when he sees a pair of well worn boots approaching him. A hand rubbing his back up and down and guiding his breathing.

Aizawa doesn't question him. He just sits on the hard ground beside him. So that's why Midnight let him leave. She knew the bandage

wearing hero was close by. Katsuki buries his head in his knees, trying to still his god damn shaking.

“I didn’t...”

“I know.”

“Damn it. Is she..?”

“She’s fine.”

“What do I...?”

“Breathe.”

He coughs instead but eventually, he breathes.

His teacher with him the whole time.

Being apart of All Might and Deku’s secret little group is odd. Helping them with keeping it a secret, discussing possible ways to help the nerd with his manifesting multiple quirks, training with him.

Its... kind of pretty cool.

Not that he’d ever admit that. Not a fucking chance.

But Deku wasn’t exactly the only kid with an All Might collection a mile long. Geeking out over movies and collectible cards and arguing fight scenes and whatnot. No. Katsuki was just a lot more chill about it in front of others and a hell of a lot more restrained when it came to décor.

And now that Deku’s calmed his tits with the whole destroying his god damn body every five minutes, its easier to accept the idiot’s quirk. Though he’d heard about the Eri shit that went down. The little girl he’d been forced to watch all those weeks ago. Oh, we can rewind time so let’s just screw the pooch every two seconds with a body rupturing move. Fucking moron.

Turn his head for one fucking minute...

They’re waiting for the nerd to come out of his house. He and All

Might... well, he and Toshinori. It feels weird to think of him outside of his hero name. Especially by his first name. It was an American thing, apparently. Though he supposed that it would cause less attention than calling out All Might in public. People still recognized the retired hero, but it wasn't as... ah, overwhelming as when he was in his larger form.

"You live close by here as well," Toshinori noted. "Do you want to stop by and say hello to your parents?"

"No."

He hasn't gone back home since he took the pills. Besides, his parents are doing great without him. His mother was fucking thrilled to get rid of him and toss him in the dorms, so he's not really all too eager to push himself on them after everything. Phone calls are enough. If and when his parents do start to miss him, it will come in the form of a demand, not an invitation. That's just how they were, even his dad.

No invitation meant they were probably in the middle of setting up a pool table in his room and investing in a mini bar. His dad was probably buying those terrible Hawaii old people shirts he'd been threatening to get since he first started showing signs of grey hairs. Just to irritate Mitsuki. His mom would buy something super slutty as revenge and it would go on and on until they both had closets full of inappropriate, distasteful apparel that they would challenge each other to wear outside of the house.

The thought was so likely of what his parents were actually doing in that moment that he flinched at the implication of going home. No. Just... no. He was good. He had no interest in being apart of what they were concocting half-assed at the house.

"I'm sure your parents miss you very much," Toshinori said gently.

Katsuki snorted.

"Nah, I don't have the same kind of relationship with them that Deku does with his mom. It's fine."

Toshinori gave him a worried look, but didn't say anything. Katsuki rolled his eyes. He didn't have a bad relationship with his parents. It was complicated and a little dysfunctional, but it was fine. He didn't see why people had to read into it so much. Treat it like one paper cut was a gaping wound threatening to bleed him dry.

'...such a thing would have been seen as inhumane and abusive, once

upon a time.'

That fucking scrotum looking piece of shit. Talking like he knew anything about his family and his life. Everyone is so sensitive about everything nowadays. Wanting to put labels on shit for no reason. He wasn't about that.

Everybody wants him to consider everyone's feelings in the room, to be nice about everything, to be considerate of the way he worded everything. It was ridiculous and exhausting and he didn't have time for that shit.

"I..." Katsuki looked up at the sound of a soft, feminine voice.

"Hello there!" Toshinori calls, waving enthusiastically. "Are you alright? You do not look well."

It was true.

The young woman's eyes were sunken in and her skin was an ashen shade. She was hugging herself as she walked towards them, her eyes brimming with tears and her voice cracking as she tried to speak. She was dressed in a rumpled suit. A small logo stitched onto the overly large V-neck collar. The black and purple and blue logo standing out against the light grey of her clothes. Her simple black hair spilling out in a mess from her bun. To put it simply: she looked like she'd seen some shit.

And her eyes were focused entirely on Katsuki.

He felt dread fill him.

'I can remove infections, diseases, cancers... anything really, with the tips of these fingers; more than that though, I can control them. Spread them among masses of people. I have.'

She reached forward and grasped Katsuki's arm, her eyes watering and filled with pain. He couldn't help himself, he gripped back, holding her steady. He knew that look in her eyes. He *knew that look*.

"You're so young," she whispered, pained, her fingers shakily touched his face.

Just as he'd thought. She'd been sent here. With the threat of her life on the line, most likely, to deliver some sort of message or threat. He had the weird fucking urge to never let go of this stranger. Locked as

they were in their own bodies. Unable to say anything... do anything to give themselves away.

She didn't need to make any grand declarations of death threats or warnings. Her mere presence was enough of a message.

The Doctor had other means... he didn't need to use innocent people like this just to deliver a message. The Doc *wanted* to do this. Despite being a fucking bloated walrus sitting useless on his chair in a fucking back room somewhere, the Doctor was more dangerous than Shigaraki for this exact reason. Fucking hands freak wasn't really smart. He was too straight forward and didn't have an inventive bone in his body. His vague ideas of destroying the hero foundations were just that... vague. When Katsuki had been kidnapped, he'd been wary of the hands-freak and concerned about how the fucker was going to attack him, but he'd known what was going on the whole time, he'd never had to guess. It wasn't like that with the Doctor, the man who was clearly pulling the strings in All For One's absence. Katsuki never knew what the piece of shit was up to or what he was thinking or how he was going to make his next move.

"You know this woman, young Bakugou?" Toshinori asked, voice wary, ready to step in if need be.

He'd never met her before in his life, but he nodded anyway, never breaking eye contact. Her lips trembled and she nodded too. Because they didn't know each other, but they knew the others circumstance. They knew the type of position they were in and it worked like a tether, latching them to one another.

"It will be soon," she whispered. Her fingers squeezed around his arm, trying to comfort him. 'He is going to come for you soon.'

"Are you going to be okay?"

"Will he let you go when this is done?"

Beside him, Toshinori's face scrunched up and his eyes hardened as he watched them. This was out of character for Katsuki, he knew, and was probably setting all sorts of alarms off in the retired hero's head.

"I hope so," her voice sounded as if it were pretty when she wasn't sick. She was terrified, shaking in his arms. He squeezed her back, trying to put as much courage and strength into it as possible. "We each do what we have to, right?"

Katsuki shrugged.

He couldn't say the same.

He would never do what they wanted.

Never.

She shook him then, seeming to understand what his motion had meant. Her eyes were wide and searching, this stranger, looking into his very soul. She shook him again. Hard.

'You do what they tell you to, kid,' the shake seemed to say. 'They'll kill you otherwise.'

"Hey now, I think that's enough," Toshinori said, uncertain as he looked from one to the other. "Young Bakugou..."

She hugged him.

Katsuki stiffened as the arms laced around him with such force for a good long moment before letting go.

"You are a strong young man," she told him.

Then she let go and staggered away.

"Wait a moment! Miss, I really think you should consider going to a hospital!" Toshinori called worriedly after her.

She laughed and continued walking.

Katsuki couldn't blame her one bit.

"What was that about?" Toshinori asked him.

Katsuki shrugged.

"I don't know... she's always been weird."

He hoped the woman would be okay.

Deku came around the corner then, passing the woman by a hair's breadth, not noticing her presence at all. The nerd was waving wildly and carrying a bag too full to close properly. Katsuki kept his eyes on the woman though, long after Deku had joined them and started babbling until her brown bun of hair disappeared completely in the

distance.

When his time came...

Would he too be that alone and unnoticed?

Chapter 4: Silent as the Grave

Chapter Summary

In which we see things from Deku's view point

Chapter 4: Silent as the Grave

They are ten when Kacchan starts to genuinely scare him.

“Kacchan, are you going to be alone at home again?”

The rigid shoulders begin to shake in front of him. Izuku kept the ten foot distance, walking far back from Kacchan, but everything that had been happening was really starting to bother him and he couldn't leave it alone. Kacchan hadn't spoken in more than three weeks to anyone. Just short one word answers when the teachers demand it and half-hearted glares.

“You can come over and have dinner with me and my mom, if you want.”

Kacchan stopped walking.

“Jesus Christ, Deku,” one lone red eye turned slightly towards him, “has anyone ever told you, you're like a life time movie? One of those stupid women that just keeps going back to the bad guys house because of love or some bullshit? You're fucking retarded if you think I'm having dinner with you and your mom. Fuck off.”

“But...”

“BUT fucking nothing!” Kacchan whirled on him, stabbing a finger in his direction. “How many times do I have to tell you I want nothing to do with your fucking ass?! Now shut up before I set you on fire!”

At least Kacchan had talked to him though. He'd said more to Izuku in those few moments before stomping away than he had in a long time to anyone. He had hoped that getting Kacchan to talk the day before hand would mean he would have a little of his old spark back, but the next day at school it seemed he was even more quiet.

Again no one was parked in the driveway of Kacchans house. All the lights were off as Izuku passed it, watching as Kacchan unlocked the door himself and moved into the darkness of the home.

He shouldn't be worried about the blonde.

But.

He wondered how Kacchan handled it. He couldn't imagine coming home every day to the lights off and no one in the house. It seemed like Auntie Mitsuki and Uncle Masaru hadn't been home for a long while now. Did Kacchan make his own dinner? Did he decide when he went to bed? It sounded both a little exciting, but also horrible.

Kacchan showed up late to school the next day.

He wouldn't look anyone in the eye and he looked kind of sick. The teachers pulled him to the side, but he seemed to sway them pretty easily. Which didn't surprise Izuku at all. Kacchan was the top student and he was never late and he never missed a day of class.

"Hey, Bakugou! You want to go to the arcade after school?" One of their classmates called out during the last period. Kacchan sent the guy a glare, going back to their work. The guy huffed, shrugging his shoulders and rolling his eyes at the others. Izuku was a lot closer to them than Kacchan so he heard what the guy whispered to his friends. "It's not like it's a loss to us. He's cool, but he can be such a prick."

"An ice queen," one of the others whispered with a snicker.

"And what's with the silent treatment lately? Like, I know he thinks he's better than us, but fuck man, drama queen much?"

More snickering.

Izuku's hands clenched.

Couldn't these people see it had nothing to do with them?

At lunch Kacchan avoided the cafeteria all together. Izuku saw him running laps out on the field from the second window he sat at. It made his hands itch with anxiety, but he knew there was nothing he could do, nothing he should do. Kacchan didn't want his help or his friendship.

That afternoon he watched Kacchan go into an empty house again.

And the day after that.

And after that.

One day Kacchan stumbled in front of him and when he glanced at his childhood friend he saw that it had gone stricken. He looked up the road to see Auntie Mitsuki leaning against the family car, one of Kacchan's bags by her feet and looking a lot more disheveled than Izuku had ever seen her.

"Izuku-chan!" Auntie Mitsuki waved warmly, a small fond smile on her face. Kacchan glanced back at him, apparently having forgotten he even existed, scowling a bit before heading towards the car. "Has Katsuki been behaving in school?"

"Ah... um, yes," he nodded his head too hard and too many times.

Kacchan grabbed his bag from the ground and ripped open the car door, slamming it shut and pretending like they weren't there. Izuku saw him shove headphones into his ears as he looked straight ahead.

"He's been very quiet though," Izuku said carefully.

Auntie Mitsuki looked grim, patting his head fondly before waving him away.

"Tell Inko I said hello, will you?"

Izuku nodded, watching as she got into the car and they drove away.

Kacchan missed three days of school and when he finally came back he didn't look good at all. If before he'd been quiet, now he was... even those jerks from before seemed to get it now. At lunch, Izuku decided to brave things and go over to Kacchan's table.

"Can I sit here?"

Kacchan didn't even acknowledge that he spoke. Izuku sat down cautiously and noticed that Kacchan hadn't gotten anything for lunch. Again. Izuku looked down at his own plate and picked up his fruit bowl and carefully placed it right in front of the ash blondes hands. When he still made no move to eat, he nudged it until it hit him a bit.

"If you don't eat, how are you going to be a hero?" Izuku pushed.

Kacchan blinked slowly, looking over at him before looking at the bowl and shrugging half-heartedly, picking up and nibbling on an apple slice. Satisfied, Izuku went back to his own lunch.

A few weeks later, a flip switched. Kacchan started talking again, but

he seemed determined that no one would be close to him. He aggressively pushed everyone away. Everyone. There were a couple of lackeys who called themselves his friends, but everyone knew Kacchan only tolerated them because they followed his orders without question. Kacchan didn't talk during class and made a point of letting everyone know he didn't want to be 'fucked with' for any reason.

Izuku tried anyways.

Kacchan decked him for it.

"I don't need you. I don't need anyone," he seethed. "Stop being a pussy little bitch and go make some fucking friends, you useless nerd. Stop following me! I hate you!"

Izuku is twelve when Kacchan takes things too far. Maybe its Izuku's fault a little too, he thinks, because Izuku purposefully pissed him off. It had been two years since Kacchan last went quiet like this and it scares him more than the bad attitude and the threats to leave him alone. Ten days of a quiet so complete that even when asked questions by the teachers they have to ask Kacchan to repeat himself two or three times to hear his answers and the teachers eventually stop asking him questions altogether.

Its not like Kacchan doesn't know the answer, but now instead of inspiring the other students to work harder, be better, with loud proclamations of the correct answer, the quiet replies just subdue the class in a way that it hadn't before. Kacchan never wavers from being the top student, but after years of being in the same classes together, they all know a thing or two. Bakugou Katsuki is strong and brash and smart and intimidating. He can be a bully and with the class its split fifty-fifty when it comes to admiration and fear.

He doesn't falter and his determination to move forward is inspiring.

In that same regard, when he goes quiet like this, for days on end, sometimes weeks, its like every drop of life is sapped from the room. Kacchan is violent at times, loud and angry all the time, but he brings a lot of passion too. Without that, everything is a little duller.

Izuku can't quite figure out what the problem is this time. He's seen both of Kacchan's parents at the house now. The car is always there except for work. Whatever issues were going on back then are obviously over now. There's nothing out of place and Kacchan has

been fine for a while. At least, he seems fine, though Izuku knows better than to assume. So he can't figure out where this latest bout of silence has come from.

It's the last few days of classes before summer vacation and even Kacchan's quiet can't quite stifle the rest of the class. Izuku follows him out the door when the last bell rings and stays a step behind until its just the two of them.

"Kacchan?"

The much taller ash blonde tilts his ear just the smallest bit. He doesn't turn or show any other indication that he's listening, but Izuku knows that he's caught the other boy's attention.

"Mom and I are having curry tonight. It's the special recipe you always really loved when we were little. I was wondering if you wanted to come over."

Kacchan's shoulders move downwards and he turns just enough that Izuku gets the full power of his glower. Then he turns and keeps walking. Not a word spoken and something in Izuku snaps a little then.

Neither of them have friends. Its more obvious for Izuku. No one comes near the quirkless kid. For Kacchan there are people who ask to hang out with him and every once in a while Kacchan says yes. People over crowd Kacchan's lunch table and they invite him to every social gathering and what not, but he doesn't ever really get along with anyone. Izuku has no one and Kacchan doesn't get along with anyone.

They walk home together though not side by side.

During big gatherings at school they tend to gravitate towards one another.

They are the top students and stand side by side at award ceremonies.

They've been in the same classes since the first day of school all those years ago.

Loneliness so deep in his chest that it physically aches has taken hold. He obsesses over superheroes and tries his best to take notes and study them as much as possible. It fills the hole in his chest just a little bit. He's tried to make friends but he can't. No one wants anything to do with him. No matter how nice he tries to be, no matter how much

help he offers, no matter what he does.

He's alone.

Part of him blames Kacchan for that. Even though it's not his fault. Kacchan doesn't have to be his friend. Despite the weird gravitation they seem to have towards one another, the strange hovering that's always within each other's awareness, but never actually interacting. It frustrates Izuku to no end. Like having a ball of light sitting right in front of him, but he can't have it because it's sitting behind a glass wall. Inches from him, but untouchable.

He hates Kacchan just the littlest bit for that.

He misses Kacchan even more though. They'd been so close as little kids. They'd had so much fun. They'd gotten along. Played heroes and villains, fighting bad guys, going on adventures. And all of that had stopped when they were six. When the full implications of him being quirkless for Izuku settled between them like a wedge.

Six years of a strained connection between them. Filled with tense words and bullying and awkward conversations and sort of friendship, but not really. Six years of distance and closeness, gravitation and opposition. Two lonely souls that didn't need to be lonely at all. Because they were feet apart. Always.

"Don't be such an asshole!"

His mouth snaps shut and he's startled by the words that leave his mouth. Kacchan is too. His head whipping around to stare at Izuku in shock.

"Oh?" Kacchan says as he turns, his fist already sparking. "And what makes you think that I owe you anything?"

There's something dark about him, Izuku realizes as he gets a good look into Kacchan's eyes for the first time in what feels like months, there's a pit there that's empty. Dulled. That look scares him more than anything he's seen so far.

Izuku bites his lip hard and stands straighter.

"You have everything," Izuku bites out. "You're talented and smart and everybody wants to be like you and yet you take everything for granted! You dismiss everyone!"

“Always so high and mighty, aren’t you, Deku?!” Kacchan hisses, his deep baritone seems to rumble in his chest and he’s shaking. Everything about Kacchan is shaking and for the first time Izuku thinks he might have chosen the worst time ever to stand up to his childhood friend. He’s not sure if Kacchan is going to crumble or if he’s going to burst.

“It doesn’t have to be like this!” Izuku snaps. “You don’t have to be such an angry, out of control asshole all the time. If you just let people in...”

Kacchan bursts.

He can’t feel his face. When he gets home his mom screams and she seems to be vibrating she’s full of so much worry and anger. She patches him up and puts an ice pack to his face and then the phone is ringing and he can hear his mom speaking angry and tense to Auntie Mitsuki. The conversation doesn’t last long and before he knows it, his mom is slumping into the chair next to him and putting her head in her hands.

“I’m sorry.”

“Oh baby, no, no, no, this isn’t your fault.” His mom wipes tears from her face and brings him into a hug.

“I...” he chokes. “You don’t understand.”

Inko wipes at her face and squeezes his knee.

“What don’t I understand?”

“I lost it today,” he admits feebly. “Kacchan hadn’t talked at all in days. Not to anyone. I just wanted a reaction... he was scaring me.”

“Oh, Izuku.”

“And when I didn’t get one... I purposefully made him angry. I said things.”

His mom stroked his hair, as he talked. She still seemed angry, but not as much as before.

“Izuku, baby, you can’t force...”

“I know.”

She sighed.

“Just... don’t do that again. You don’t deserve to be hit. Ever. Katsuki should know that no matter what anyone says to provoke him, he doesn’t have the right to hit them. No matter how angry he is, its not right to use violence.”

Kacchan doesn’t come to school for the last few days before summer vacation. Izuku doesn’t see him in the windows of his house and it seems as if the Bakugou house is deserted except that the car is still parked in the driveway. He’s not sure what to make of it.

A few days later into summer vacation, there’s a knock at the front door in the middle of the night. Izuku knows without going downstairs its Auntie Mitsuki. She comes over sometimes and his mom makes tea and they talk long into the early hours of the morning. He normally turns over and goes back to sleep. Whatever they talk about isn’t any of his business, but he has a feeling its about Kacchan this time.

He’s got this feeling that its his fault that Kacchan missed the last few days of school and hopes, despite everything, that Kacchan didn’t get into too much trouble. Well, he kinda hopes he did. He hopes Kacchan gets into just enough trouble to not do that again, but he doesn’t really think that’s what will happen.

Still, his curiosity and dread are enough that he props his door open and stays leaning against the wall right next to the door. They live in a small apartment and both his mom and Auntie Mitsuki’s words come to him crystal clear.

Words isn’t right though.

Auntie Mitsuki is sobbing.

He’s startled, eyes wide, because he’s never seen the touch woman so much as flinch or tear up. Yet here she is bawling her eyes out on his mother’s shoulder. His mom appears equally flustered. Trying to ask what’s wrong and whispering reassurances even though Auntie hasn’t said anything yet. Finally, finally after the long hand has traveled halfway around the clock in his room, he hears Auntie calm down enough to be heard.

“I fucked up so bad, Inko...”

He can hear the movement of chairs now. His mom is moving about the kitchen, making tea, no doubt. This is wrong. He knows its wrong, but maybe he'll finally figure out what was going on at the Bakugous. Why Kacchan was so...

“I hit him.”

Izuku stills.

“After that phone call and... everything, I got into a screaming match with Katsuki. We said things. I said things. Horrible things and then...” Auntie brings in a shuddering thing that sounds like it might be a sob, but not quite. “I grabbed him by the arm and I hit him... more than once. Asked him if he liked it since he did it to other kids so much.”

There's a long silence. His mom whose usually so quick to reassure doesn't seem to have anything to say.

“Masaru pulled me off him. Told me to pack my stuff and get out for a few days. He couldn't even look at me and Katsuki...”

Izuku feels sick to his stomach. He takes back everything he said about wanting Kacchan to be punished. He feels like the rugs been pulled out from under him. He never thought Auntie would... He'd seen her slap Kacchan about the head a couple times, but Kacchan only seemed irritated by it.

“Katsuki looked so hurt and angry,” Auntie sobbed. “I didn't mean it... I just... its not an excuse. Fuck. Its not an excuse. I fucked up so bad. I don't know if I can fix this.”

“Of course you can fix it,” mom says. Her voice is strained though. There's an anger in her voice that he's never heard. “The first thing you need to do is apologize. The second... Mitsuki, you need to see a therapist about anger management, its clear where Katsuki gets it from. You both need to go through those exercises together, I think.”

“I know. He's such a good boy, Inko, all his bad qualities, all of them he got from me.”

Auntie is breathing roughly.

“He gets straight A's without fault. He does his own laundry. He

makes us dinner sometimes and I trust him in the kitchen. I trust him by himself in the house. He's such a little adult. He never needs help with anything. He..."

Her breath hitches.

"We failed him so bad, Inko, he can take care of himself, but he doesn't know how to talk to people. No. That's not even right. He talks to the adults at the hospital just fine. He talks to them on their level. He uses vocabulary so advanced, it's the kids his own age... he can't relate. He doesn't know how. He so aggressive with them. It's like... like he's terrified to get close to them for some reason. I don't..."

"I've seen him," his mom says quietly. "When he's walking home ahead of Izuku, when my son tries to talk to him, he gets so tense. He starts walking faster. And the look on his face, it's like he'd rather face down a villain than turn around and talk."

"He can't open up. About anything. Not even with us," Auntie says quietly. "It's like pulling teeth trying to get him to talk about school. I... you know, we've been gone so much, dealing with all this stuff and I didn't want Katsuki to be left alone so much so I..."

The tea kettle goes off.

He hears his mom pouring cups of tea and the clinking of plates, indicating that she pulled down treats from the cabinet at some point.

"I put him in extra classes that were near the hospital. Music courses and language courses and cooking courses. Anything that meant he was being kept occupied, but maybe I should have worked harder to find people for him to spend time with. Maybe it would have been better to be at the hospital with people. There's kids there, sick kids, but they could have used having someone there to talk to. That would have been better."

He hears Auntie sniffle loudly.

"He just... it seemed like the right thing to do. He's always diving into things with such an obsessive nature. He can speak Spanish and English on top of Japanese, he knows sign language, he did well with the drums and... he's so talented. He just takes everything up like a fish to water, but he can't... he only has two modes, aggression and isolation. It's so scary to see him just... check out."

"Check out?" his mom asks quietly.

“Every once in a while he just... shuts down. He works. He picks up a textbook or goes out and runs laps, but its just... its odd. He doesn’t give up or stop his normal routine, but he won’t look anyone in the eye. He keeps his head down. He goes silent, Inko, so quiet its like he’s a ghost. No door slamming, no talking, no banging. Silent as the grave for... shit. Sometimes its weeks. He ignores our questions unless it’s a no or yes type. He... its so fucking scary. I don’t know what to do.”

“Izuku mentioned it,” his mom tells her. “I didn’t realize it was that bad. You know how kids are. They tend to exaggerate. That’s the reason for the fight, from what I could tell, Izuku said that Katsuki was scaring him and he just kept bugging him until...”

There must have been some sort of hand gesture. Izuku couldn’t see from his position. So Kacchan did it at home too? That information makes a sick feeling in his stomach grow. Though it made sense. Though who was in the hospital? Was it Auntie Mitsuki or Uncle Masaru? Was it Kacchan? It didn’t sound like it was Kacchan. Why did they have to go to the hospital so much?

He’d never heard of the extra classes either. Part of him was impressed with Kacchan even more, if that were possible. Another part of him felt really sad. Izuku spent his free time studying heroes and playing video games and exploring the town. He couldn’t imagine doing all of his school work and extra classes and all the other stuff Kacchan was doing like cooking and laundry and stuff.

“I don’t know what to say to Masaru,” Auntie admitted. “Everything’s been so hard for so long and we’re just now starting to go down the right path. He hasn’t been able to be home full time in a while and I feel like I’ve fucked it up just as we were starting to pull things together.”

“It’s probably going to be a while before this is fixed, but you all have been dealing with some really awful stuff for a prolonged amount of time, something was bound to snap,” his mom said quietly.

What awful stuff? Izuku tried not to breathe too loudly. His mom would be so disappointed in him if she caught him eavesdropping, but he couldn’t help it. This was his family. As much as Kacchan didn’t want to acknowledge it, their mothers had been best friend’s for years before either Izuku or Kacchan were born and Auntie Mitsuki and Uncle Masaru were more apart of his life than his own father. He pushed the thoughts of his dad as far down as possible.

“Katsuki’s been sleeping in the room with Masaru all week. To make sure he doesn’t need anything and that he doesn’t take a turn for the worst when no one is looking. I wasn’t even aware that he knew Masaru needed that. I was so careful to make sure he didn’t know how hard it is to keep Masaru home instead of at the hospital. Katsuki’s been making sure he takes all of his medicine and even knows the fucking dosages. He makes Masaru eat at every meal... what the fuck have I done to deserve the kid? He’s got my shitty personality and Masaru’s depressive moods and yet he’s more responsible than the both of us put together. He’s cares so much about people, but he doesn’t want anyone to care about or for him. He puts up such a front. He pushes people away so hard.”

“I wish I could help,” his mom tells her. Her voice sounds strained, unlike herself. “Izuku is so easy to read. I always know when he needs a hug and he’s always so welcoming. He’s never shut me out and he’s very... self-aware. He might not know exactly how to word things sometimes, but he uses these metaphors...” His mom laughs wetly. “It gets his point across. I always understand what he means.”

“Izuku is a sweet kid,” Auntie agrees. “So docile and friendly, but he’s strong too. I was always worried Katsuki would unintentionally overpower the kids personality, push him around, but... he always just bounced right back and stood his ground when Katsuki goes to far. He’s got a spine hidden under that big smile of his.”

“That’s his father’s trait shining through. A spine so rigid and strong I’m not sure a train running him over could break it,” its said in a tone Izuku doesn’t recognize. He’s never heard his mom speak like that.

“Have you heard from him lately?” Auntie asks.

“He calls every week. He’s absent, but he’s not absent, you know?” He can hear his mom doing her fiddling thing. Picking her mug up and putting it down restlessly. “He told me this is how it would be before we ever got married and I told him it didn’t matter. I told him I could handle it. He told me that I could change my mind at any time, that if it ever got hard, just to say the word and he’d make sure Izuku and I were taken care of. He loves me, but he loves his job more and he knows its terrible, but that is how it is.”

“I couldn’t do it,” Auntie says, absently. “I need Masaru. He keeps me kind. He keeps me grounded.”

“Its hard sometimes, but for some reason, no matter how much time

passes between, I love him just as much when he comes home. It never dims. We talk so much during the week and he always has these wonderful stories of what he's working on and the people he works with. Sometimes the bitterness gets to me, but it never lasts long and it never gets deep. It helps that Izuku is so wonderful and open too."

Izuku's hands clench.

He didn't talk to his dad nearly as much. His feelings were a lot more complicated. Maybe because his mom had gotten to spend so much time, physical time, with his dad before they ever got married, before Izuku came along. He doesn't really think about the man, to be honest, more of an over glorified pen pal than anything.

"You are too kind, Inko, or maybe I'm too much of a bitch," Auntie says.

"Mitsuki!" His mom snaps. "Don't call yourself that. You know how I feel about making derogatory comments about yourself. I won't hear it."

His Auntie sighed.

"I should get going. Face the music. Masaru is probably still up waiting for me. I said I'd be heading back some time tonight and he probably wants to talk."

Izuku sneaks back into bed, but he doesn't sleep that night or the next few nights for that matter.

When he goes back to school after vacation ends, Kacchan acts as if nothing has happened. He's back to his normal self, only the wall between them seems thicker. Izuku doesn't invite Kacchan to dinner anymore. Coincidentally, neither he nor Kacchan tend to smile anymore either. Trapped in their own individual zones of isolation, one unwillingly, the other doggedly.

For Kirishima, the first morning Bakugou gave him the silent treatment had thrown him so off guard he'd followed his friend to class like a kicked puppy, wondering what he'd done wrong for most of the morning.

Bakugou had helped him out with his history homework the night before. Going over the dates more than anything to make sure the little details were in place for the exams. He'd taught Kirishima his little tricks to remember certain things. Like how in 2105 when the first law concerning quirk restrictions was finally put in place there had been 1,052 arrests made in a demonstration of power against dangerous free reign quirk users, which happens to be almost exactly half of the time period. Remembering one means knowing the other. Which somehow seemed to make it easier to remember both.

Nothing had been wrong, but the next morning Bakugou had stumbled out of his room, ignoring his usual greeting and walking a few steps ahead of him instead of falling in sync with him like normal. The ash blonde wasn't exactly known as being friendly or aware in the early morning, but this seemed to be a purposeful show of avoidance. Kaminari had given him a questioning look and all Kirishima could do was shrug. Then at lunch, instead of walking together with the rest of the class to the cafeteria, Bakugou had gone straight back to the dorms.

"What crawled up his ass this time?" Sero muttered.

"Who knows, let's go eat!" Ashido pushed both of them from behind.

By later afternoon though, it became clear to them that something was definitely wrong. In afternoon training, Bakugou didn't take the lead. He followed Iida's commands in the team exercise. Even Iida was giving him looks of concern.

"Hey, uh, are you, okay?" Kirishima finally asked, walking up to Bakugou as they finished bringing out the 'rescues,' a large assortment of manikins. Bakugou glanced at him and... nodded, before turning away, walking towards the locker rooms. Hesitantly, he threw his arm around Bakugou, jostling him a bit to try to annoy him. "Come on, man, liven up a little. Speak to me!" Bakugou glanced dully at him before shrugging him off.

"Kacchan!" Kirishima watched in confusion as Midoriya walked up, pulling out an energy bar from his back pocket. His short classmate didn't say anything else, just shoved the bar into Bakugou's hand and forced his fingers to tighten around it. The half hearted glare Bakugou sent lacked any sort of heat behind it and much to his surprise he watched as Bakugou opened it and crammed it in his mouth as he entered the locker rooms.

“Hey,” Kirishima called softly, “do you know...?” He gestured towards Bakugou.

Midoriya shrugged, giving him a weak smile, and shaking his head.

Despite his answer though, it looked as if Midoriya did know. He was completely unsurprised by what was happening while everyone else was left throwing cautious, concerned glances at their normally volatile and loud classmate. It was frustrating.

It didn't get better either.

Bakugou locked himself in his room that night and refused to come out, even for dinner. The next morning Kirishima waited for Bakugou to come out for classes only to figure out later as he rushed to make it on time that his friend had left ages ago and had been the first to arrive to classes.

A pang of hurt cut through him.

They always walked to classes together. Ever since moving into the dorms. It didn't seem personal and because of that he tried to stamp down on the feeling. Bakugou was acting so out of character though. It was like he'd shut down.

But why?!

What happened? Was it the panic attack last week? He'd seemed fine after he'd come back to class though. He'd been fine last night. There were no signs that the moment Midnight caught him off guard had affected him outside of the hyperventilating. Aizawa had assured him... them, that Bakugou was fine and his best friend had snapped at him when he'd pushed about the matter. Nothing else had come up about it though. He'd been bothered about accidentally burning Midnight's fingers a little, but even she had been quick to assure him it was alright.

“What is the difference between a hero Provisional License and a police officer's Provisional License?” Aizawa asked shortly after class began. “Bakugou?”

Kirishima watched as Bakugou blinked once at his teacher as if caught off guard. When he spoke it was in a rough voice his friend was forced to clear before trying again.

“Location. A Police Officer has permission to use their quirk for public

use within their own country. A Hero has permission on an international bases once they become Pros. They are, essentially, an extension of peace. Students who have earned their PL but who have not completed schooling have the same location limits as Police.”

“Good and Business License?”

“Is permitted the use of a quirk for work purposes as long as it does not endanger or disrupt the public.”

“Good.”

Kirishima saw Kaminari roll his eyes.

“How does he do that?! He’s not even paying attention!”

Kirishima shrugged, grinning a bit as he shoved his worried thoughts down for another time.

“Suppose he’s just that good.”

Ashido wagged a finger at him from her desk, the white of her teeth flashing against her deep pink skin. “You always sound like a proud papa when you talk about him, Kiri, its adorable.”

He blushed, banging his head lightly against his desk.

“Why do you have to say stuff like that?”

“Cause its true.”

Much to their worry, Bakugou didn’t improve the next day or the day after that. On the fourth day, Kirishima followed him up to his room when he saw his friend intending to lock himself in his the his dorm again. Before the door could close, Kirishima grabbed firmly onto it and forced it open.

“What are you...”

“What’s going on with you?” Kirishima demanded, forcing the door open more and stepping through. “I’m serious man, we’re all really worried about you and this is getting out of hand. Even Todoroki wanted to know if you were okay. Said King Orca made a comment during your guy’s remedial stuff.”

Bakugou stared at him for a long time before grabbing his gym bag and cocking his head towards the window in a silent question.

“Give me a minute.”

He met Bakugou out by the front door. A few of their classmates gave him relieved looks as he shuffled out the door towards the gym. They had such trust in him. Faith that whatever problem Bakugou seemed to be stressing under, Kirishima was the man to fix it. It made him straighten his spine and unclench his fists.

Without a word they changed and started doing warm ups. As always. The difference was that the silence now was heavy rather than the casual, friendliness that it normally held. He wasn't even sure if Bakugou noticed it, the guy looked completely out of it, like his mind was a million miles away, so it was probably just Kirishima who felt the atmosphere trying to suffocate him. As they marched onto the floor and stood in their normal stances, Kirishima finally broke the silence.

“You gonna finally tell me what's up? This isn't like you to play the enigmatic brooder.”

Bakugou grunted, cracking his neck and sizing Kirishima up and down.

“Not brooding,” his voice was still rough, entirely too quiet for Kirishima's liking.

“Then what is this?”

“Don't blow this out of proportion, shitty hair. I'm just buckling down for exams, like you all should be.”

“Really? Because you've never done this before. Not for any of our past exams. We've been working together for nearly a year and you've never gone quiet like this. So you want to try another round of bullshit or are you going to be honest with me?”

“Tch.”

The small sound was the only warning Kirishima got to harder himself before Bakugou launched himself forward. The jabs were open palmed, fire slamming into him to throw him off balance. He resisted the urge to dig his feet into the floor to give himself more leverage. Light quirk use in the gym to avoid unnecessary damage. Those were

the rules.

He straightened his fingers instead, turning it into a long sword like weapon with his hardening and swiped downwards to force Bakugou back. The limited use of quirks didn't just affect him after all. Bakugou could only use his quirk at close quarters to try to throw him off his feet while in the gym so Kirishima had the advantage here.

With a smirk he pushed forward, swiping again and again with his arms and surprising Bakugou with swinging his legs out. They were both close combat specialists when it came to hand to hand, but he'd been working with Iida lately to try to improve his lack of versatility in his fighting style.

Bakugou used a closed, fiery fist to block the leg, just enough combustion to keep the sharp edge of his legs hardening from cutting into his fists. Kirishima cursed as time and again he was forced to go on the defensive. Bakugou's reaction time was seriously freaking insane. There was no taking the guy by surprise.

Kirishima took a heavy hit to the shoulder, it knocked him back and he found he couldn't quite get his feet under him in time so instead of stumbling back, he hit the floor and rolled. He braced his arms against the next blow, Bakugou coming down on him with more ferocity than Kirishima had seen all week in training. He grinned back, throwing him off at the last second and getting to his feet.

"Now that's more like it," he muttered.

They took a break for water a bit later, after they were both gasping for breath and covered from head to toe in sweat. It felt good. All his muscles stretched to the max and a pleasant burning that he rarely got outside of sparring with Bakugou who was just as intense in a match as himself.

Kirishima nudged him. He hoped that the work out had softened him up enough that he wouldn't blow a gasket. Here was the best place for it though, if he was going to lose his shit.

"Is it the nightmares?" He asked.

Bakugou made a noise somewhere between a sigh and grunt, his head lolling to the side in a rag doll fashion as he fixed Kirishima with a tired glare.

"Listen," Bakugou growled, "I know you lot like to make everything

have a deeper meaning or some shit, but nothings wrong. Everything's fucking peachy and the only thing that's bothering me is your guy's need to fix shit that doesn't fucking need fixing. Take your hero complexes and go shove them up someone else's ass."

Kirishima frowned, giving the blonde an unimpressed look. His friend ignored him though, chugging his water bottle before standing.

"Want to go another round?" Bakugou asked, already marching onto the mats and turning to face him.

"If something was really bothering you though, you promise you'd say something, right?" Kirishima pushed.

Bakugou grimaced.

"We're fucking friends, aren't we? If I'm gonna be a pansy ass bitch and cry my heart out, you'd be the pansy ass bitch I'd go to. Does that make you feel better? Is that what you're looking for? Now come ON. I want to kick your ass."

Kirishima chuckled.

"Alright, alright, I'm coming."

It wasn't until later that night that he realizes that Bakugou hadn't even tried to deny that he was suffering from nightmares.

Izuku is sixteen and its happening again. Kacchan's gone quiet and its freaking everybody else out. At first they chalked it up to a mood, but by nightfall of the second day everyone began to give him worried looks. Kirishima looks like he's about to have an aneurysm. Izuku watches wearily from a distance though. Unwilling to interject quite yet. Until he knows for a fact that its not just a mood, but another bought of... can it be called depression? Its probably the appropriate word for it despite its general shortness.

He recognizes it a lot better for what it is than when they were kids. Everyone looks on in surprise and startlement. As if this is a one-eighty in Kacchan's personality. Something unrecognizable.

They really have no idea.

Kacchan quietly works through class, not responding to anyone's

barbs or teasing. He works on hero training wordlessly and from a distance, catching the teachers attention now. There's a world of unease that's settling among them.

It's the morning of the fifth day and when he walks into class he heads toward Kirishima's desk. The redhead is glancing at the door, his brow furrowed and an uncharacteristic frown on his face.

"He only answered at all because I threatened to break his door down," Kirishima tells Ashido and Sero. "I don't..."

"Hey, Modoriya!" Sero greets him.

It affectively cuts the conversation short. He smiles weakly at them, unsure if he should even be doing this, but knowing everyone will blow things out of proportion otherwise. They'll push Kacchan and do something that will break something. Izuku's not sure what that something is, but he doesn't want it to happen.

"Listen... about Kacchan," they go silent and Kaminari whose walking up beside him snaps his mouth closed mid greeting, golden eyes intent. Kirishima has tensed up and he can tell that their other classmates are listening in too. "He does this every few years," he explains carefully. "It's best just to give him space and to not make a big deal out of it."

"So he'll be back to normal in a few days?" Kaminari asks.

Izuku bites his lip.

"No... it usually lasts six or seven... weeks."

"What the hell?" Sero breathed. "What do you mean it lasts... You mean he just randomly goes silent as the grave for weeks? Just... fine one day and just..."

Izuku shrugs.

"It's best to keep you're distance and make sure he doesn't skip too many meals."

He regrets saying that almost immediately.

Kirishima's eyes are blown wide and his sharp teeth are gnashing together.

"Nope, that's not okay," Ashido whispered, looking at Izuku like she's

seen him anew for the first time. “Blasty can’t... this is too weird. Hasn’t anyone ever... you know.”

“Tried to stop it?” Sero finished.

“Have you met him?” Izuku asks, a bit bitterly. They wince. Getting Kacchan to relax took half an army and the patience of a saint. Getting him to do something he didn’t want to do was damn near impossible.

“What...” Izuku looked to Kirishima, who looked pensive as he asked. “What did you mean when you said make sure he doesn’t skip too many meals? I... I haven’t even really been paying attention at dinner time, but... I don’t really remember him grabbing much. He’s been avoiding eating with us, but I thought...”

“He doesn’t purposefully do it,” Izuku rushes to assure them. “And not often either. He just...” He waves his hand distractedly. “When he gets like this he sort of doesn’t notice when he starts skipping meals? Which I don’t think would really be a problem, but he doesn’t stop working out when he gets like this either. Its like... he’s in focus mode and his mind is a million miles away. He sort of works himself into the ground. Like he’s distracting himself from something else...”

Izuku has been wracking his brain for the last few days though and he can’t figure out what triggered this in Kacchan. Auntie Mitsuki hadn’t really seemed to know last time it happened either. Things had apparently been going well before that day.

It was in that moment Kacchan walked into the room. Like startled rabbits the group, and eavesdroppers abound, skittered to their seats. The ash blonde ignored all of them though, wandering over to his seat and pulling out his stuff. If he noticed the numerous eyes falling onto his back throughout class, he made no indication of it.

He wondered if Uncle Masaru was back in the hospital or if something else had happened. He caught sight of Aizawa sensei glancing at Kacchan too, but as expected, the man made no verbal indication that he’d even noticed the change.

“For Hero Training, we’ll be heading over to Ground Gama. Two to a group. We’re midway through you’re second semester and Mid-Exams are coming up, so I’ll allow you to choose your partners today.” There was a short roll of excitement that swept through the class before their teacher silenced it with a stern glance. “Don’t make me regret it.”

“My dear, Monsieur,” Aoyama appeared from nowhere when the bell

rang. “Would you do my the honor of being my partner?”

Izuku smiled, used to Aoyama’s odd manner of speech, but not quite enough to stop the unpleasant feeling going down his spine. He’d long since realized that the bright blonde had social awkwardness down to an art form. He didn’t realize how... creepy some of the things he said and did were like... the cheese thing and... definitely not the rock thing. And Izuku was not the person who would be informing Aoyama of that.

“Sure, it will be fun.”

Izuku glanced over at Kacchan, seeing Kirishima had practically vaulted over the desks to partner up with his best friend. Kacchan looked tense and seemed to be responding to Kirishima in the most minimal way possible.

“He is quite rough around the edges, isn’t he, our Bakugou?” Aoyama asked, winking dramatically. “But we’re ALL here for him, you know? We’re all watching his back.”

Izuku’s smile was more warm as he looked at his friend.

“Thanks, Aoyama.”

“It is no trouble. Now, shall we?”

Chapter 5: Anxious Thoughts

Chapter Summary

In Which the stress and anxiety might just be starting to get to Bakugou

*Spoilers for chapter 219

Alright folks. This chapter leads us directly to the end of the manga timeline so the last of our familiar cannon is here. Everything that happens from this point forward is an alternative timeline.

If you haven't read passed the anime, then this chapter may be confusing to you.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Chapter 5: Anxious Thoughts

What will come, will come. What will happen, will happen. Stressing out about it won't help. Lamenting over it will only make every day it does not happen feel longer and more painful. Katsuki knows that. He knows.

Yet.

‘It will be soon.’

He can't help it. He's struggling. At every meal he wonders if this will be his last. At every training session the pointlessness of it strikes him. He feels like he should say goodbye, but he doesn't want to panic anyone. He doesn't want his friends and his parents to freak out or start thinking the wrong thing. He doesn't want them to be stressed like he is, to know that there is a sickle above his head ready to drop at any moment.

Its been months, but somehow it feels as if its happened too soon. He feels unprepared. He still has no plan. He still hasn't been able to figure out a loophole around the quirk keeping him silent. He doesn't know how to reach out for help.

He feels out of body. He wants to live every moment to its fullest, but his head feels like it's full of cotton, like he's a mile underwater and the pressure from above is crushing him. He withdraws from interacting with people. He can't handle it right now. He can't.

"Bakugou, will you stay after?"

He blinks and looks up at Aizawa who is eyeing him like King Orca had the day before. A tight ball gathers in his chest and he nods. The bell must of sounded while he was out of it. He sees Kirishima watching worriedly from the door and jerks his head angrily for him to get lost. His best friend frowns at him, almost like he wants to scold him, but leaves.

"You seem distracted lately," Aizawa starts off. There's a pause, as if he expects Katsuki to answer the unasked question. When he doesn't, the man sighs and gestures for his student to sit down in the side chair beside the desk. "King Orca says that you're doing well in the remedial courses. He's concerned about the sudden silence though. I am too. A few of your classmates have expressed their own worries. Does this have anything to do with your panic attack the other day?"

Yes.

Does answering that count? Katsuki opens his mouth, but then closes it.

Aizawa nodded, as if his silence was answer enough. Katsuki met Aizawa's stare head on and wished it was possible to communicate with just his eyes. Yes. It has everything to do with why I panicked. Yes. There's an evil Doctor that has the power to kill me with a snap of his fingers. Yes. Please. Help. Help me. Please.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Aizawa asks.

Katsuki twitches. He has the urge to slam his fists on the desk. He wants to destroy everything in this god damn room. He can feel himself shaking with the urge. The need to get his message across. But he can't.

Fuck, he can't.

He sits down. He stares at his hands, watching the small tremor in them. Little 'pops' sound as tiny detonations go off across his fingertips. He clenches and unclenches them. Avoiding looking at Aizawa now as a genuine feeling of hopelessness overtakes him for the

first time in this mess.

‘It will be soon.’

“No,” he looks up at Aizawa. Begging his teacher to understand. Yes. Yes. Yes. “I don’t want to talk about it.” I can’t. I can’t. I...

Aizawa sighs.

“My door is always open. You have the full resources of UA available to you.”

Aizawa hands him a card that Katsuki doesn’t bother to look at. Papers he doesn’t bother to read over. Contact numbers he will not be calling.

“Bakugou, everyone needs a little help every now and then,” Aizawa tells him. “Even me. Its not a weakness to reach out. It makes you a healthier, more well rounded individual.”

Katsuki can’t help it. He scoffs, standing a little too quickly and rushing out the door, slamming it shut behind him. The sound is a lot like his heart cracking.

He’s being fucked with. Its been two full weeks since that message and there’s been nothing. The Doctor is playing with him and fuck all if he isn’t winning. The stress has completely worn him down to his bones. He can’t eat. He can’t sleep. Committing to any social interaction at all is the worst, most exhausting commitment.

His stress is causing Kirishima stress which is bringing down the whole groups moral and he doesn’t fucking want that. He’s tried to push the redhead away, to tell him everything is fine, but he’s fucking Eijiro Kirishima, the guy is all stupid fucking muscles and bravado and determination and he won’t quit. It figures his best friend would be someone who could match Katsuki’s own stubbornness.

“Eat,” Kirishima growls, slamming down a tray of food. Katsuki grimaces, but complies, popping a cherry tomato into his mouth as the red head stomps away to get his own food.

Sero whistles, sitting down across from him.

“Ohhh, man, I can’t believe you’ve finally managed to piss Kirishima off. I didn’t think that was possible.”

Katsuki doesn’t reply, choosing to shove rice into his mouth instead. He pops open their textbook and starts browsing through the chapter Aizawa went over today only to find his book snatched out of his hands. He looks up to see Kirishima glaring down at him.

“What the fuck?” Katsuki snaps.

He stands, facing off against Kirishima who, for once, looks to truly be in a foul mood. They stare each other down. A dead silence from their classmates at the surrounding tables, all eyes on them. Even Kaminari is tensely quiet.

“No more working.” Kirishima hisses. “No studying. Eat your god damn food or I swear...”

“What?” Katsuki asks, growling under his breath. “What the fuck do you think you’re going to do, huh, Shitty Hair?”

He knows his palms are smoking. He can feel tiny explosions peppering his hands. Kirishima hardens in response.

“You can’t keep going like this. Its been weeks.” Kirishima barks out. “You’ve barely spoken a handful of words to anyone and you’re starving yourself.”

Katsuki snorts at the ridiculous over exaggeration, grinning savagely.

“You want a go, Kirishima?”

“No!”

The single word is full of so much exasperation and anger it makes him blink in surprise.

“I don’t want to fight you. We’ve sparred every night this week without breaks yet you haven’t been eating nearly half as much as you normally do. No more fighting!”

Then, it was as if inspiration had hit the idiot because his skin softened as he ended his quirk, a small victorious smile spreading across his face. Kirishima stabbed a finger into Katsuki’s chest, making him growl as his foot was forced back a step.

“That’s it!” Kirishima laughed. “I won’t spar with you anymore.”

“What...?” Katsuki growled.

Kirishima’s smile was shit eating now.

“I. Won’t. Spar. With. You. Focus on eating your food or I won’t train with you tonight.”

Katsuki blinked, staring at him in disbelief.

“Holy Shit,” he heard Horns mutter.

Kirishima looked completely serious. An explosion escaped his palms out of pure frustration before he sat down hard at the table, viciously biting into a bread roll while glowering angrily in the fuckwits direction. There was a long moment of silence, before a small, startled laugh came from the redhead, before he sat down heavily beside Katsuki, burying his head in his hands.

He couldn’t finish the meal. It wasn’t that big, but the thought of eating it all made his stomach twist a bit. Maybe Kirishima did have a small... tiny, insignificant point about not eating enough. Hero Training had been more difficult lately. He’d chocked it up to being worn down by the Doctor and stress, but maybe he was doing a bit of damage himself as well.

What with the remedial courses and the messenger...

...?

A thought struck him like one of Kaminari's bolts.

Only a few days left before the final remedial course with King Orca. Katsuki blinked slowly as he stared at his plate. Was that it? Was that the mind game the Doctor was playing at? Waiting until just before he got his Hero License? Waiting to strike just as Katsuki would grasp hold of his dreams?

The sick feeling got worse.

He covered his mouth as he gagged.

“Bakugou?” Kirishima asked, voice small. He felt a hand on his back. He could feel Kirishima lean up against him, trying to get a view of his face. “Shit, dude, do you need... you should have said...”

Katsuki waved him off, breathing slowly through his nose as he fought to steady himself. He would be a hero. Even if he became one with his

last dying breath. Even if the fucker downed him in the middle of the god damn exam, he'd use those moments to gouge out the bastards heart. Make sure he could never harm another person ever again.

"Why don't I take you to Recovery Girl?" Kirishima was saying. His voice filtering through what felt like a sheet of ice between them. Katsuki shook his head, too tired for this shit.

"Let's just go to classes," Katsuki told him, standing slowly, he could still feel Kirishima's hand at his back, steadying him.

"Bro," Kaminari's voice cut in, golden eyes wide and full of concern. Sero and Ashido stood behind him, watching too closely.

"Fuck off, I'm fine," he spat, grabbing his bag. "I'm going whether you losers decide to follow or not."

They followed.

Of course they did.

Mina Ashido rocked back and forth on her heels as she waited to be rescued. Her boys were at the top of cliffs edge, scaling down to her. It was one of the great things about being in a class of twenty and having four best friends in her little gang. She always got to work with at least one of them it seemed. On the rare occasion when that didn't happen, it wasn't really a big deal because she loved all of her classmates. Well, perhaps not Mineta, love was a little too strong of a word, the short little grape was more on a neutral level of tolerance with her.

She was hopeful that he'd grow out of his... unhealthy, desperate... lecherous behavior.

Hopefully.

Today she was not working with Mineta though. She's working with Tsu, Kaminari and Blasty. It worries her a bit, that while she can hear Kaminari and Tsu arguing about the best way to get down and 'secure' her, the victim, she can't hear Bakugou. She knows... they all know that he almost got sick at lunch.

No one is saying anything about it.

Everyone is watching though.

“Maybe its just the Remedial courses,” Yaoyorozu suggested in a whisper to Iida, so soft, she almost didn’t pick up on it. “He’s always so hard on himself.”

That didn’t sound right to her though.

Bakugou stressed, sure, but not like this. Not in this way. This was different. This wasn’t anger and fury and fire raining down on them as Blasty sorted out his feelings and needs. This was... This didn’t feel right.

So she tests the waters.

“I could have bled out by now with how long its taking you guys to come up with a game plan!” Mina yells up at her team. There’s a snort of laughter from Kaminari. Thankfully, there’s also the sound of moving feet and the scrape of rock so her point was taken. She hears a small boom and watches as Bakugou leaps off the cliff far above.

She loves it.

The small adjustments he does mid air. The way he knows just how much power to put behind a move to get him in just the right position. No one really talks about it because Blasty’s personality overwhelms everything else.

But.

When people talk about her friend its with words like ‘aggressive,’ ‘mean spirited,’ ‘competitive,’ stubborn,’ and yeah, ‘asshole.’ The other things though, that go hand in hand with who he is, that are ignored... like ‘genius,’ ‘passionate,’ ‘protective,’ ‘quick thinking,’ ‘leader.’

Bakugou lands lightly in front of her, eyeing her critically before looking up at the high walls of sheer rock around them. He looks down at her ‘bandaged’ leg with a raised eyebrow. She grins, throwing a hand on her forehead and falling to the ground.

“Oh, ow, the pain, its too much! Please, Mr. Hero, will you save me?”

She flops on the ground, winking at him. He rolls his eyes, but still doesn’t say a word. Instead he catches the rescue mat with a grunt and sets it down on the ground beside her. She stretches her arms out as

she watches, noticing with chagrin how there's an unhealthy leanness to his face. She knows there are dark marks under his eyes, despite the mask he's wearing right now. Smears of black and purple that have been there for days. She has the urge to reach out and pull him into a hug even though she knows he hates that sort of thing.

When he leans down and gently puts his arms under her back and legs, she reaches forward without hesitation and throws her arms around his neck. He stills for a second. Looking at her out of the corner of his eye, but he is supposed to be rescuing her so he can't complain even when she makes a show of snuggling into his chest as he lifts her onto the rescue mat. He knows what she's doing, but rather than throwing a fit and dropping her like she expects, he squeezes back. Just a little.

She grins against his skin. A little too warm. Like a furnace.

"Thank you, Mr. Hero."

She's not talking about the fake rescue.

He tugs on the rope, telling Tsu that she and Kaminari can pull her up. Still so silent, avoiding looking her in the eyes and she can't help a deep seed of distrust and suspicion that takes hold. His arms linger under her in support for a moment too long, his fingers withdrawing slowly.

He's hesitant to let her go.

Mina frowns as she's pulled out of sight. When she reaches the top, she takes Kaminari's offered hand. His golden eyes are looking down at the crevice she was just in with a deep intensity and when he looks up to meet her own there's a silent worry that seems to be tossed between them.

Bakugou comes up a moment later.

He is steady and strong and there's no hint of the nausea from this afternoon. He grabs the rescue board and starts to wrap the rope all in one fluid movement. Mina eyes the thick hero's winter costume he's wearing. Looking for signs of the lack of eating. There's nothing though. A little too lean around the jaw, but... that's it.

Bakugou seems as unfazed and unstoppable as always. He tilts his head in the direction of the end goal point, walking with the absolute knowledge that they will follow him. One by one, they do, because if

there's one thing about Class 1A that they all know in their hearts, its that they will always be there for one another.

Whether it's a training exercise.

Or walking through the gates of hell.

Early December, Sunday Morning. He's twitchy as fuck. He's a twitching, manic fucking shit who can't sit still for two seconds and every time anyone so much as breathes wrong, he finds himself snarling in their direction. Instead of Ground Zero they're going to be calling him Schizo. Fucking hell. He needs to get his shit together.

"Have some Tea," Toshinori tells him. Grabbing his hands and holding them a bit too long as the fucking golden boy hero looks him in the eye. He puts the hot thermos in his hands. "It's perfectly natural to be anxious."

Then he lets him go.

Not a subtle bone in his body. Katsuki can't help it, he gives the man a savage grin that, in his own way, is rather fond. He holds the thermos with one hand, reaching up to rub aggressively at his neck where tension has made every inch of him stiff.

"I ain't fucking nervous."

Not about the exam anyways. King Orca could kiss his perpetually doomed ass because he's fucking earned his license ten times over. He had this shit in the bag. No. What worried him was the very real threat that the Hands freak or his array of fucked up phychotic wonderfucks planned to crash the exams with the Doctor at its head.

He wasn't going with them.

Not a fucking chance.

"Bakugou, my boy, please loosen you're grip."

He turned, blinking.

"What?"

Large over sized hands attached to an emaciated frame grab his own. He hadn't noticed, but his hand was tugging hard at the hair by his ear. Unconsciously. He could feel loose strands in his hand now. With some difficulty, he unclenched, letting go.

Across from him, Todoroki (the bastard), was looking at him. Brows scrunched up as those mismatched eyes shining with confusion. They'd been working through these remedial courses for months together and Katsuki knows he's acting out of character. He hasn't shown even a hint of nerves this whole time. He stares out at the snow coming down, early morning sunlight reflecting off the ice to cause it to be overly bright despite the severe overcast.

"I'm not nervous about the remedial exams," he repeats.

Toshinori seems to catch his meaning.

"Then what has you nervous?" The retired hero is absolutely serious. It's one of the things he's always respected about All Might is that the man never treats them like kids. He treats them like heroes in training. He trusts them.

"I..." Careful. Careful. Don't fuck up the wording. "I just have a really bad feeling."

Toshinori nods slowly. He looks a little tense now. Grim. Todoroki also looks more alert.

"Well just have to be careful and keep a watch out," Todoroki says, keeping his voice that overly careful neutral. His classmate trusts him too. Despite the fact that they've never really gotten along well.

He nods tightly, keeping his eyes focused out the window again. He's easier to watch the scenery pass them by than it is the tension he's created. Its better this way though. They're weary now and that means they are less likely to be taken by surprise if the League of Villains comes after him today.

He clutches at the thermos with both hands now. Sitting rigid all the way to the testing grounds. He's tense as they put on their gear. Siff as they stand in front of King Orca. This is it. Any second now.

"Today's the day I finally say Ta-ta to you slack jawed fools. That thoughts go me in a great mood! Ready for the pain, you specks of Plankton? Let's do it!"

The Exam has begun.

Those motherfucking bastards are really getting a kick out of this. The fucking cunts are probably sitting around a box of pizza laughing themselves sick at Katsuki's expense. Fucking tipping wine at each other and going 'ho, ho, ho, bet the brats about to break.' Stupid shitfaced colossal fuck ups. He'll show them. He'll annihilate them. Think its so fucking funny to stress him out like this, like it's a fucking game to them, like destroying his fucking nerves was a sadistic past time.

'Hey, want to fuck with that Bakugou brat after tennis?'

'Sure thing Twice, just let me clean my knives up real quick.'

'You want to send a messenger of death or just torture him for a little bit?'

'Oh, why not a bit of both? We'll get drinks afterwards.'

'Think we can get him to puke his guts up tonight?'

'Well, we can sure try.'

'Hahahaha.'

Fucking pieces of shit. Every last one of them. He should hunt them down. Fucking skin them alive like the fucking pigs they were. Could he skin Warp Gate? Whatever. He'd trap his fucking disembodied dick in a jar or something.

He'd make them all pay.

"Bakugou?" He looked up to see Todoroki eyeing him wearily next to Camie and Inasa.

"What?" He snarled.

"Seriously, Bakugou," Camie sighed, her lips poking out in a pout.

"Why are you such a drag? You being pissy right after we get our License is bumming me out."

"It's none of your business."

He turns away from her, marching over to Toshinori, glancing around the place, half expecting it to blow to kingdom come at any moment.

His entire body is itching with adrenaline. He feels sick to his stomach.

“Do you still feel off?” Toshinori asks, scanning the area himself.

Katsuki snarls, folding his arms as he stands next to the man.

“Like worms are eating at my skin,” he tells him honestly. “I hate this.”

“Always trust your gut instincts,” Toshinori tells him. “Even if it isn’t obvious. Sometimes its something that we’ve overlooked. Something we saw in a split second out of the corner of our eye, but it didn’t register right away. So our mind is telling us something is wrong despite the fact that nothing appears to be wrong.”

“Right.”

On the way home they stop purse thieves. They are officially heroes now. And its like he told Toshinori... there is no time limit on when you can start acting like a hero after becoming one. The time is now. He doesn’t have the luxury of waiting.

What he doesn’t understand is why he was allowed to become a hero. Why wait until after he’s succeeded? After he’s fulfilled his resolve?

Toshinori and Todoroki have settled down.

‘A damn good sixth sense,’ All Might tells him proudly, clapping his back.

Todoroki doesn’t comment, but is giving him a considering gaze. Katsuki doesn’t know whether to take a breath of relief, scream in frustration, or blow shit up. He thinks, for the first time, that they might just be winning against him.

The League of Villains might appear to be full of a bunch of fucking idiots, run by a man child with issues, but there are people involved who are much more cunning. People who seem content to sit in the shadows of the League, playing puppeteers. Never showing their hand.

Katsuki is quiet.

He's never really considered himself a brooder. That's Deku or Todoroki or anyone of his classmates. Talking a problem into the ground instead of fixing it. Moaning and groaning about difficulties and what not instead of just handling shit.

In the silence, he lets his mind drift- daydream really, about what the future would look like if he hadn't fucked up. If he hadn't been kidnapped. He thinks maybe it wouldn't be so bad if he and Kirishima opened up an agency together. That would be cool.

Kirishima was the type that would probably get a kick out of training sidekicks and interns. Katsuki would handle the finances and bookwork because there was no way in hell he'd let that fucking idiot get his hands on the paperwork running the place. That would be a disaster. Kirishima could handle PR.

They'd be a kickass Hero Duo. He'd work his way up to the top while his best friend befriended every wounded fucking puppy in the city and carried snot nosed brats on his shoulders and shit.

Deku would, obviously, open up his own agency. Maybe with Ururaka or Todoroki- he could totally see the half and half bastard doing just to spite his asshole father. It would be a good agency, efficient, but not as good as Katsuki's. Obviously.

He'd bet money on Tails and that visibly challenged chick being married right out of school. Probably invite the whole class and shit and that would be there first fucking get together right out of high school because their all fucking impatient idiots.

Tokoyami would probably have his shit together though. Dark Shadow fully under his control, he'd probably be making a name for himself as an underground hero even before he graduated.

He pulled his knees up to his chest as his thoughts drifted away from him. He'd never really thought much about this stuff. Always figuring that there was a better use of his time. Always knowing that he was going to be there to witness these things. He'd work with Kirishima and they'd help those fucking idiots- Kaminari and Ashido and Sero get their ever loving asses in gear and make names for themselves. He'd work with Deku, unwillingly, of fucking course, let no one be mistaken, to keep Villains in their place. In fucking jail.

They'd do great.

He'd never doubted it.

Not once.

This was the first time he was willing to admit that he might not be there though. He might not be able to see any of that. Not Jiro ask Kaminari out- he had fucking money going on that shit, Sero was fucking stupid if he thought Sparky would be making the first move. Not in this life time.

He might not see Deku make One For All his.

That thought really bothered him. In all of this trouble, he couldn't even begin to guess where all of this would lead. It made him feel a little sick, thinking about Deku going forward alone. Well, he wasn't ever alone, Class 1A would be there for him.

But Katsuki wouldn't.

It was such an odd thought. It felt wrong. Sounded wrong. For as long as he could remember, everything he'd done, everything he'd witnessed and gone through, there was Deku there too. A constant presence.

It was odd to picture a future where Katsuki wasn't right dead in the center. It stings.

He imagines his parents being sad, for a little bit, but... they'd be fine. He'd been so removed from their lives for so long, it wouldn't really be too different for them. The Quirimorbus had retreated so Katsuki wasn't really needed anymore. They got along so well since his dad had started to recover. The only arguments in the house centering around him, either about him or with him.

They'd been so happy to get rid of him.

They were so happy without him in the house. Pleased he was moving into the dorms. They'd practically packed his bags themselves. Was it really all that surprising though? If he was being honest with himself?

When his dad had finally been approved to come back home full time, to start working, living again, he'd thought it was great. He thought they'd go back to the way they were before. He and his dad hanging out and talking all night and cooking in the kitchen. He and his mom arguing about this and that, but not tensely, not hostile.

It hadn't been like that at all though.

They pulled away from him.

The only time his mom talked to him seemed to be when he was being scolded or when she thought he was lacking. That he couldn't do his homework or laundry or dishes. Lectures about having a better attitude, about being nicer, more like Deku.

His dad stayed in his room and seemed to... he didn't seem to even like Katsuki anymore. He wouldn't look him in the eye. His lips would go thin and tight when Katsuki walked into a room, flinching when he talked.

Still nice though. Always smiling and soft and kind. But it was a self-contained bubble. Katsuki could see it, could hear it, but it felt like it was a shield. His mom could penetrate it, but it felt like Katsuki was on the outside looking in. The way his dad sat, just a little turned away from him. The way he held his arms in front of his body, like he was warding himself against Katsuki. The way his eyes slid passed him, never quite looking him in the eye.

It had hurt.

Logically, if he tried to look at it from a logical standpoint, he understood that his dad has suffered a lot. Even if he had physically recovered, it didn't mean he'd mentally recovered. Masaru tried to kill himself, after all, he'd been in so much pain for so long that he'd tried to kill himself. And the only person who'd been there for him was his Mitsuki.

Katsuki had been alone at home.

Katsuki had been in extra classes.

Katsuki had been in waiting rooms and medical rooms donating blood and marrow and reading books quietly in corners because seeing his dad would be 'too much for a child.'

Katsuki understood logically that it probably didn't have anything to do with him specifically. He was loud and abrasive and rude and all those terrible things that probably make things harder. He knew he couldn't be anything else. He was not nice. He was not gentle. He was not quiet.

So... yeah. As much as the thought hurt, stabbing him like a rusty knife in his chest, he figures that his parents would be fine. Hurt and sad for a bit, but fucking dandy in the long run. Probably better.

He knows that his parents love him unconditionally. Just as well as he

knows his parents don't really like him. He's their son. They'd do anything for him. They just don't want to be around him. Large hands grab his.

Katsuki pauses, looks up to see Toshinori staring at him in deep concern. His wrist is in a tight grip and with embarrassment, he realizes he's tugging roughly on his hair again. He lets go. As he looks up, its to see UA surrounding them.

They've arrived home.

He's home.

Chapter End Notes

And here is where the lack of communication between parent and child tag comes in. As with many things in life, our dear Katsuki has drawn the wrong conclusions. Bless his very warped view of the world and lack of social skills.

Chapter 6: Denki Kaminari

Chapter Summary

Okay guys... I fucked up. Like... I really really fucked up. So as I was writing the next chapter and I needed a reference from Chapter 6...

and very quickly realized I never published Chapter 6.

It just wasn't there. Chapter 5 was there and chapter 7 was there... but no Chapter 6. I forgot to publish a HUGE chapter. Like... this beast is over 10,000 words.

And I was like... shit.

So I've spent this last month trying to figure out how to incorporate all the scenes into the current arc so I didn't interrupt the flow and so I wouldn't throw all of you guys off and figured out that I can't do it. These scenes need to go at the 1/4 mark of the story. They don't make sense anywhere else. So I'm pretty annoyed and I was like... can I just... leave it out? Apparently, no one noticed that it wasn't there, so is it really necessary? But it lays a lot of stuff down for Kaminari and it has some really important stuff for these upcoming chapters.

So I'm sorry for posting this ridiculously out of order.

Chapter 6: Denki Kaminari

It's always the same nightmare when he dreams of his time being kidnapped. It's too hot. He's trapped in a tight space. Confined and surrounded on all sides by slick, hot liquid that feels like its sucking him dry, stealing his breath.

And the Doctor is always there, always watching too closely, taunting him for being weak or asking him how All Might is -since Katsuki's the reason he was forced to retire. Sometimes he just smiles and looks him up and down and it makes his skin feel gross... grosser than it already is. He feels filthy and violated even though he's fully clothed and there's a wall of glass between them.

He always, always wakes up in pain. Falling asleep while being tortured is the worst thing ever. Or is it falling unconscious? There is a difference, but he's so exhausted he can no longer tell which is which.

A whistle draws his attention.

His head lulls to the side before he squawks angrily as a piece of bread is shoved hard against his lips. He bites into it, his teeth barely missing fingers as they are hurriedly extracted and a noise like a dying mouse leaves Kaminari's mouth.

"Oi!" He hears Sero's voice call out. "What have we told you about feeding the animals Kami!"

Katsuki grabs hold of the pepper shaker and chucks it at Sero who dives out of the way. It hits an unaware Ashido who screams obscenities at them both. He doesn't yell back because for once he feels like he deserves what Horn's is throwing his way. Unlike the useless lectures to be nicer and more considerate of people's fucking feelings. His job is to save lives not to be a god damn cheerleader.

He rips the bread in two with his teeth and swallows it in three bites.

"Good to see you have an appetite," Kaminari tells him, those balls he carries around showing again as Sparky sits right the fuck down as close as possible to him on the bar stools of the kitchen. "Kirishima isn't the only one whose been worried about you, bro, no one's really seen you eating."

"I eat," Katsuki dismisses, tired of this argument.

"Hm," the noise sounds wholly unconvinced.

Katsuki grabs another roll, waving it around sarcastically as he bites into it. He stretches outwards and looks outside. His muscles feel tensed up from stress. His back a mess of knots. Some stretches and a run would do him good. He folds his leg out and stretches it out,

feeling some of his bones pop and the muscles around his joints expanding as he forces them into familiar positions.

It feels good.

It also wakes him up a bit more, the exhaustion jostling inside of him as his mental scape shakes awake like a wet dog. He bites into the bread and pulls out his phone, pulling up a lecture by a hero called Cautious Turbo on Fire rescues. He shoves his earphones in and stands, getting ready for a long job.

“Hey, hey, hey!” Kaminari calls, looking him up and down. He doesn’t take his earphones out, but he doesn’t press play either. Katsuki tilts his head backwards so that he can look the shorter blonde in the eye. “Are you seriously going to go work out after only two bread rolls?”

Katsuki shrugs, walking over towards his shoes.

“What the hell is wrong with you?! Talk to me, man, its ass of clock in the morning and on a Saturday and you’re already going out?”

So fucking annoying. Katsuki shoves his feet into his shoes and glares at the blonde whose moving from foot to foot right in front of the doors. As if he could stop him. Katsuki, gently for his standards, pushes Kaminari out of the way.

“I can go with you!” Katsuki turns around to see Kaminari doing some weird ‘wait’ hand motion as he stumbles over his feet to put his own shoes on. “Seriously, it will be fun!”

His muscles hurt and his head is foggy and all he wants to do is go stretch them out and force his brain to wake up a little bit and yet here he is, waiting like some god damn saint for Sparky to get his shit together and follow him.

The shorter blonde looks nervous for some fucking reason and Katsuki feels the urge to bang his head in the wall. Great. Sparky’s got

something to say and he's taken advantage of Katsuki being all by his lonesome. This was either going to be some shit tearful thing dunce face was going to cry about or it was going to be a lecture aimed at him about some moral bullshit or, possibly worse than the first two options, Kaminari wanted his help in helping someone else. Katsuki looked around, hoping to see someone better suited to this, but Horns and Sero were still arguing like five year olds and Kirishima looked like he was falling asleep at the table.

God damn it.

Kaminari grabs a jacket to follow him out and Katsuki doesn't let him interrupt the walk with his chatter, moving into a fast jog that's almost a run. Sparks grimaces but doesn't complain, keeping pace with him as they move around the campus. He hits play on his lecture, listening to the words of the far too perky hero as he goes through different ways to enter a destabilized building correctly.

It's nice, being able to see Kaminari out of the corner of his eye as they jog.

It's also unbearably cold. He can practically feel his pores shriveling up and his sweat withdrawing into his body it's so cold. He hadn't quite realized, even with his jacket on, just how chill the morning was. He shivers and because he's watching Kaminari, he sees the stray look of concern, the way the others eyes narrow at him.

He moves his shoulders every now and again, trying to get the lingering pain to go away. It stays, much to his annoyance. The time frame between the end of the torture and his body returning to its normal equilibrium getting farther and farther apart. He doesn't like what that implies for further down the road, but he's not there yet, so he doesn't have to deal with that particular brand of bullshit just yet.

There's a tap on his shoulder.

Katsuki pauses the lecture, not turning his head or slowing, but he glances at his friend to let him know he's listening.

“I know you’re not really in the mood for talking,” Kaminari starts.

Fuck.

It’s going to be a sermon on his behavior.

Katsuki feels the stress headache he’d almost gotten rid of come rearing back like a fucking monster to sit at the base of his neck. He rubs at it hard, breathing slowly as he comes to a stop. He grabbed at his shoulder blades, trying to massage the muscles there with his calloused fingers, digging into the flesh there to loosen them up.

There’s a tiny cowardly part of him that sort of hopes one of his teachers or classmates springs out of the bushes to stop Sparks in his tracks but Katsuki’s never been about that. He stomps the feeling down with his heel and tries to not bite Kaminari’s head off just because he wants to talk.

Fucker better appreciate what a wonderful human being he is. Especially when they could have had this shitty conversation some place warmer than this deserted path. He can almost see his breath in front of him and his shivering only further tenses up his muscles. He grimaces as he realizes he really won’t be able to run after this unless it’s inside the USJ. And that building is a fair distance from the dorms.

“Are we just going to stand here all day or are you going to tell me what it is you fucking want?” Katsuki demands.

Kaminari looks around like the shady motherfucker he is and pulls something out of his pocket, handing them to Katsuki. He takes them, examining the cards? Metal chips? He raises his eyebrows, asking him the silent question.

“Okay, so, it’s a computer program,” Kaminari tells him, stuttering as he spoke for some reason. “I bought it at I-island with some of my work savings ‘cause I thought I’d try them out and it’s actually really super useful. You plug it into your computer like a USB, you see, and

it automatically boots up.”

“What does it do?” Katsuki asked, eyeing the cards with a smidge of trepidation.

“It’s... don’t be mad!” Kaminari waves his hand around. “But its an AI therapist. It helps you to go through your problems without having to actually deal with another person. You can talk to them and problem solve and talk about different sorts of ah... different solutions and tactics to help you out.” Kaminari tapped his head maybe a bit too harshly. “It’s done wonders for my ADHD in helping me with study tactics and stuff so I thought it might help you...”

Kaminari looked like he expected Katsuki to start shouting, but honestly, he was kind of touched by the idiot’s suggestion. It was oddly considerate.

“You don’t need it?” He asked.

At his neutral tone, Kaminari looked relieved.

“No. Besides, I got Mei to make me a copy, don’t tell anyone I said that. I’m pretty sure it’s illegal.”

Katsuki shrugged, frowning down at the chip.

“And the AI can’t reach out, right? Like... it’s not gonna record the shit I say or fucking send my conversation to other people?”

Kaminari was looking at him funny now, concern shining in his eyes.

“No,” Sparks said slowly. “It only exists on your computer once you plug it in. It’s a limited use program, as far as I know.”

Kaminari had folded his arms and it looked like he wanted to say something else, but he’d bitten his lip hard, staring at Katsuki expectantly. He shoved the chip into his pocket, thinking carefully

about how safe it might be. He rubbed the back of his neck again, the stress headache beginning a small, steady throb that he knew would not be going away any time soon today.

It would be nice to have something he could vent to, though the idea of talking at all, saying the words out loud, made him feel a bit sick.

“Thanks,” he said gruffly.

Because there was a part of him that felt like he might spontaneously combust if he didn’t find some kind of outlet and even if the AI program couldn’t offer him solutions, just being able to brainstorm with some form of interaction sounded like it would really help. Kaminari might never realize just how much this was needed, but that didn’t mean that Katsuki was an ungrateful asshole.

Kaminari beamed.

They jogged the rest of the way to the dorms in relative silence. Or, at least, it looked as if Kaminari was keeping his mouth shut as he listened to the lecture on his phone.

Ashido and Kaminari and Kirishima were kind of hopeless when it came to listening, but he’d bet Sero would get a lot out of these lectures. He should probably send him these. Might be a good study habit for their tall friend to get into.

He opened the door and waited patiently for Kaminari to catch up, who’d been distracted by some shitty bird a bit back. Kaminari caught him holding the door and shot him another smile, practically prancing into the dorms for some reason.

The other idiots were smiling and waving, already dressed for class.

Katsuki rolled his eyes at them ignoring Kaminari giving them a thumbs up.

He'd never understand the idiots.

Denki worries his bottom lip as he watches Bakugou go to his own room to prepare for classes. That had been... weird. No fight or argument about the idea of therapy like he'd thought. Just a paranoid notion towards being overheard.

That didn't sit well with him at all.

It was private sessions... to an extent.

What he hadn't told Bakugou was the AI's warning systems in place in case he said anything in the way of self-harm which would automatically send out a signal through the program's mainframe to ensure safety of the user. As the owner of the program, Denki could also go in and access those files if he chose to, but he would never do something like that.

It was a breach in privacy Bakugou would never forgive him for.

It was just a failsafe though, in case Bakugou... well, in case he tried anything. Denki had done it more to put the others at ease than anything else, though after that conversation he was beginning to have his own doubts.

Of course, Bakugou was a very private person. He was naturally an introvert. Though he was sure not many outside of their class would believe that with how loud the guy could be. Denki fiddled with the program in his hand, wondering if Bakugou would actually use it or if he would just keep it in his room.

"You don't need it?"

Bakugou wouldn't have asked that if he planned to disregard Denki. He wasn't that type of person. If he took it then he planned to use it. Otherwise, he would have just brushed him off or exploded at the

supposed insult.

That was also something that had him worried.

Bakugou had almost seemed... excited wasn't right word. It didn't fit. Yet it did a little. Desperate was more in the way of how he'd taken it, but that wasn't... Bakugou didn't do desperate. The guy was all confidence and bullheadedness and yelling.

Except when he wasn't.

"The only thing in life you can be absolutely certain of is that life and the people who inhabit this world are infinitely complicated and the more you try to box them in, label them, classify them- the more they'll defy your expectations and thinking," his mom told him long ago during a day he should have been in school, but was instead skipping with her at an art gallery. Both were hoodies to cover up their blonde hair. Medical masks to cover their faces. Like two people on the run.

"People aren't born good or bad. They're born neutral. Genetics might have them leaning towards one end more than the other, but it's our choices that ultimately decide where we stand. Even then... it's a spectrum. Good people can do bad things and bad people can do good things."

He remembers how soft her hands always were. Electricity flowing between them like an open wire. Pleasant and controlled through her electromagnetic quirk. The rubber soles of their feet ensuring all excess had a safe conduct. Her voice always cracked when she spoke, like she was permanently suffering through male puberty. Voice going up and down and fading out.

He loved it.

"If you want to be a hero, remember that the people you fight aren't all villains. Some of them are just petty thieves. Some of them are rotten-murderers and ra... people who do awful things. Some of them are just trying to make it to the next paycheck and some of them are dressed in expensive attire and steal so that they can add one more blood diamond to

their wife's ring. Criminals are a spectrum too and you need to make sure the severity of your force and the mercy you show reflects what they've done."

He'd put his foot in his mouth on more than one occasion because of that line of thinking- like with Stain. That had been downright embarrassing and unintentionally hurtful to Iida. Yet he saw what his mom meant. Heroes calling low grade purse thieves Villains and referring to them as if they were less than human. Using 'Villain' as a term for every type of criminal and every law broken.

It didn't seem right.

But maybe Denki was biased in that regard.

Denki fiddled with his own AI, courtesy of Mia. He glanced at Bakugou sitting across the classroom. No one missed the half lidded, dogged way he paid attention in class, like the guy was one second away from falling over in his seat, unconscious. Every once in a while, he'd tilt a bit to the side and Midoriya would half rise from his seat, ready to catch him.

Aizawa would pause.

Nothing like that ever happened though. Bakugou would straighten using what looked like sheer force of will, his eyes too wide and his hands clenching the side of his desk.

Midoriya would sit down uncertainly and Aizawa's eyes would linger for a moment too long.

Class would continue.

Bakugou never seemed to notice this exchange, too busy trying not to fall asleep in class. Denki wasn't sure how the sleep-deprived walking trauma case managed to still get some of the best grades in class but it was borderline scary.

Bakugou was a beast.

And not in the way most people seemed to think he was one.

At lunch when people started gathering their books and supplies, no one missed the way Midoriya and Hagakure lingered around Bakugou as he stood (except maybe Bakugou himself). They always waited until either he or Kirishima or Sero or Ashido were standing beside Bakugou before they moved away.

“Hey buddy,” Sero called out to their friend in a placating manner. “Why don’t I get that bag for you?”

“Fuck off! I can carry my own shit, you dweeb,” Bakugou snapped, as if to prove his point, Bakugou slung his bag over his own shoulder violently and marched passed all of them. Denki covered his mouth to hide his snickering at the offended look on Sero’s face, but come on, what did the guy expect?

Bakugou could be dying and he’d still insist on carrying his own bag.

The thought sobered him up.

Bakugou didn’t exactly look steady as he walked- marched, down the hall. He clipped a door frame and hunched in on himself like a dog recently kicked, fangs showing and mouth snapping at anyone who got too close.

He stood in line like that.

Sat down at their table like that.

Kept to himself the whole time like that.

Pushed around his food, nibbling here and there, as if that was sustainable. Denki watched in agitation as Kirishima threw Bakugou angry looks, nudging his shoulder, bullying him into eating more.

And then Bakugou went to hero training like that.

Half-conscious and just forcing himself forward. Dogged in his determination as he leaped fences, rolled out of the way of swinging projectiles, dodged hits, flipped backwards and landed with the grace of a cat.

“Bakugou,” Aizawa called out, his no nonsense voice dripping with disapproval. Denki paused his own work to listen in. “If you need a break. Take it. If you want to go back to the dorms and rest then just speak up.”

“Don’t need to.”

Aizawa’s eyes narrowed in that slitted way that always made Denki feel like he was a little kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

“If you faint, I’ll let Recovery Girl decide your punishment,” Aizawa warned.

Denki shuddered at that.

Forced bed rest in the clinic with that scathing woman’s eyes glaring at you while getting the lecture of a lifetime in between patients. Not fun. Denki had one too many of those after short-circuiting.

“Good thing I’m not gonna faint then,” was Bakugou’s non-plussed reply.

And then the bastard proceeded to do the entire elliptical course like it was a casual walk in the park. All with twenty pairs of eyes watching him, expecting him to fall at any moment. Gearing up for

the second when Bakugou's steps would falter or when he wouldn't quite manage to dodge something. Aizawa spent the whole class period hovering too close to where the explosive member of their classmate was working and not one of them were fooled by the casual stance.

But Bakugou didn't fall.

Denki couldn't understand how someone could look seconds away from passing out for hours and just not pass out. Bakugou walked away with a sway in his step that had nothing to do with sexual appeal and everything to do with a lack of stability. He sat down hard and chugged a bottle of water all while avoiding the eyes on him.

"Kaminari, you're up!"

Denki did not do as well as Bakugou and that stung. How the hell was he supposed to become a hero when he couldn't even keep pace with Bakugou at his absolute worst? He grumbled about this the whole way back to the dorms to Sero who hummed half-heartedly in agreement.

"How... just... how?!"

"Don't know man," Sero mumbled as they trailed behind Ashido and Bakugou. Kirishima leading in front of all of them. "Sometimes I think he isn't human. Midoriya says he was like this as a kid too."

"There's no freakin' way," Denki muttered. "Gosh, I pity his mother. Can you imagine? Tiny little Bakugou insisting he can... I don't know... jump off a cliff and just freaking doing it. Successfully! Or running into traffic because he thinks he can beat the cars and then proceeding to beat the cars!"

Sero snickered tiredly.

"Little Bakugou declaring he'd win the spelling bee and then making it to the national level!" Sero suggested.

“Baby Bakugou getting his teeth in before any of the other babies!”

“First to get his quirk!”

“Little Bakugou fighting all the big kids for dominance!”

“Forget the big kids... I bet he was taking on middle schoolers and high schoolers when he was still in elementary school,” Sero crowed, practically falling over himself laughing.

“And winning!” Denki wheezed.

“I bet he was telling heroes how to correctly beat up villains at some point! I’d put money down on that!”

“Shut the fuck up!” A familiar angry voice snapped from up ahead. Denki did not shut the fuck up though, the new voice just made him laugh harder. Sero was holding onto him, leaning so far in he was actually using Denki as a crutch. Bakugou’s red eyes glared into them, but for once the blonde didn’t press the issue, seemingly too tired to put on a full display of fury. “I never lectured a god damn hero on how to do their job, who the fuck do you think I am?”

“I don’t know,” Midoriya piped up as he walked by them, speaking cheerfully. “I remember Axel coming to our school to sign autographs and you asking why the city council hadn’t sent someone who could actually do their jobs right.”

Denki lost it. Howling with laughter as he heard the sound of mini-explosions and Bakugou’s furious growl. Their class appeared torn between snickering and full out laughter. It was pleasant and warm and comforting and all sorts of other likable adjectives Blasty seemed to despise with such gusto.

Sero wiped tears from his eyes as he patted Denki on the shoulder.

“Hey, hey, Midoriya, buddy, pal, compadre, wait up! Do you have any other gems about Pop Rocks over here?!” Denki called, pulling Sero with him as they hovered around Midoriya.

“Go to hell!” Bakugou snapped. “Don’t you say fucking shit, Deku!”

“But Kacchan!” Midoriya protested. “Your friends want to know more about you!”

“Spare me your shit and die!”

In the next moment there was an explosion and green lightning shooting across the ground. Deku winked at him as he dodged the explosions aimed his way. But soon enough glowing red eyes and bandages forced them both to stop, Bakugou glaring the rest of the way to the dorms, Midoriya whistling.

“I think I see what Bakugou means about Midoriya being secretly evil,” Kirishima mumbled, looking entirely too impressed.

Denki cracked up again.

“The adventures of Deku and Kacchan, can you imagine?” He stage whispered.

Not too far from them he heard Ururaka sputter, trying desperately to cover her mouth as Iida patted her on the back with a little too much force.

“Midoriya says Bakugou is much nicer than he used to be,” Todoroki spoke up, voice entirely genuine and without judgment.

“Oh my god,” Denki murmured. “We dodged an actual bullet.”

“Get the fuck out of my face with your god damn condescending whistling you fucking shitty nerd! I know what you're doing! You might have everyone else fooled but you're not fucking fooling me! Back the fuck off or I'll cut your tongue out with your own fingernails!”

“He's so kind and generous now,” Ashido whispered.

“A real demonstration of moral fiber,” Denki nodded solemnly.

“We should get him a trophy to commemorate his growth,” Sero agreed.

Like a demented owl, Bakugou turned toward them, his finger jabbing in their direction.

“Oi! Don't think I can't hear your shitty words, you assholes! Any piece of junk you want to give me is going straight up your rectums, you worthless losers!”

“Such a wide vocabulary,” Ashido stage whispered. “Do you think he has a thesaurus hidden somewhere for different curse words?”

“It's right next to the patience I have for your bullshit, Horns!” Bakugou snapped.

Kirishima reached out and grabbed all of them, bringing them into a tight hug, before reaching out and manhandling Bakugou forward with his hardening quirk.

“I love all of you guys so much. Don't ever change.”

“Motherfucking... get off!”

Denki opened his own arms up and threw them around the group. And while Bakugou snarled and grumbled about the forced, unexpected embrace around them, he didn't push any of them off or

fight them.

And they all knew he was more than capable of it no matter how tired he might be.

Which basically meant he wanted this hug as much as the rest of them did.

So he felt no qualms about shoving his cheek right up against the volatile blonde and laughing when Bakugou yelled. Because this was Bakugou's version of accepting a hug. So Denki hugged harder because he had a feeling Bakugou needed it a hell of a lot more than he was willing to say to any of them.

From the tight hold Sero and Ashido also put into it, he figured he wasn't the only one who thought as much.

Katsuki eyes the AI program warily.

He'd been pranked by Kaminari way too many times to believe there was a trick here. They guy could slip in a lie better than anyone else in the class. His morals weren't as hero-ish as the rest of the idiots either. He might not be smart or clever in the traditional way, but that didn't mean he was actually dumb.

Forgetting that might be a fatal mistake on his part. He'd already found the emergency mechanism built into the system. Trigger words that would automatically alert the original program holder if they were said, words in the mainframe that suggested the person was planning on killing themselves, harming themselves or others, things like that.

It made sense.

And he'd bet his secret All Might collection that Kaminari had known about that back up before handing the program over. Katsuki tapped

his fingers against the desk as he continued reading the online manual.

How accurate was Rheina's ability to detect his intentions in leaving behind a message?

He found himself tugging at his hair, in thought, a few strands falling free in his not so gentle hold. The taste of ash hadn't entered his mouth until Midnight picked up the paper. So Katsuki could create the message as long as he had no intention of showing it to someone... was that it?

Using Trigger words.

...

Well, if he died then at least he tried, right?

Katsuki opens up the program.

The kitchen has run out of his brand of tea. Black as his soul and bitter as his attitude. He knows he had at least a week of tea left so that means there's some fucker whose stealing his tea. He takes a deep breath and lets it out.

What a way to start out his morning.

His eyes slide over to Sato, eyeing the sugar freak suspiciously, but the half-asleep brain dead fool naturally reaches for some fruity fucking herbal shit that ain't even fucking tea to begin with, so he knows the fucker didn't jack his shit.

He slams the cupboard door, startling Sato. The taller, broader teen blinks slowly at him before pretending as if he hadn't seen or heard anything at all. Smarter than he looks. Katsuki mutters darkly as he heads back to his room, getting dressed in his thick winter jacket and

heading towards the exit. He isn't some pussy footing little shit who puts things off for later. It doesn't matter that it's seven in the morning and that everything still hurts or that exhaustion begs him to crawl back into bed. He doesn't procrastinate when there is a problem just because he's not at his best.

He's getting his tea.

The wind hits him first. Full in the face and cold enough that his teeth start to jolt against each other, clicking awkwardly in his mouth. His bad mood deepens.

This is why he has to go out.

Some fucker didn't want to be inconvenienced by the cold and misery of the weather so they decided to steal his shit on the sly. Lazy inconsiderate assholes. He'll burn them when he finds out who the culprit is. Thinks they can get away from taking his motherfucking tea.

That was fine.

That was fucking dandy.

He'd replace the empty box with Cajun spice in a tea bag. Teach them a lesson. Make sure they never took anyone's stuff again. Or something that looked a little more black like pepper. Yeah. Black Pepper. A little peppercorn medley. That shit could fuck you up in one solid sip.

Then they'd have a numb mouth AND have to go out into the cold to replace their own shit instead of stealing. Really, it would be heroic of him to teach a lowlife a life lesson, a good deed to start out his day.

"Er... Kacchan, full-offense, but that smile could scare babies."

The voice doesn't match the name being said.

His head snaps up to see Kaminari a few steps ahead of him, looking wary and bundled up, seeming to be heading into town the same as him. Katsuki grunted, catching up to him as the bright blonde slowed down for him.

He's not entirely sure why Kaminari has suddenly started calling him that. Ever since the disaster that was the Provisional License Exam, the idiot has taken up the name. At first he was too distracted to call him out on it. Then it had felt like it had been too long to make a fuss.

"I'm out of toilet paper," Kaminari offers. "There's not a lot outside of that to get me up this early in the morning on a Friday."

Katsuki ignores the silent question; 'what has you up and about when you normally sleep in?' They both ignore the fact that Katsuki's been put on the list of 'needs an escort or classmate' when he leaves campus. It's clear Katsuki didn't ask anyone to go with him, but Kaminari seems content to act in the capacity anyways and to ignore the fact that Katsuki had been planning on not following one of the more strictly enforced rules.

He's too tired to deal and too exhausted to be social.

He hears Kaminari sigh.

They've all been pestering him with questions lately. Board game and video game invitations he's never gotten before even outside of his small click, plates of food shoved into his hands, more attention than he's comfortable with. He's not sure why. He's been religious in his actions to keep things hidden.

He hasn't really been in a talkative mood. He hasn't really wanted to do much socializing. But when has he? Maybe it's been a bit more obvious lately, but so what? He's not exactly a cheerful bundle of goodness and sunshine even when he's being more involved so why

are these ass wipes acting all concerned? Overdramatizing idiots. The lot of them. Someone fucking sneezes and they act like they've got terminal illness. They need to chill the fuck out.

It's probably Deku's fault.

When wasn't it Deku's fucking fault? Nosey bastard.

The wind blows and Katsuki curses violently under his breath. He hates the cold. He hates snow. He hates ice. He hates wind. He hates everything about this fucking morning. He feels the ache in his bones still and walking feels like he's stretching his skin too far, like he hasn't quite settled into his body yet. Or like he has a sunburn that's nowhere near healed and the skin needs to regrow in order to be flexible.

He feels shaky walking next to Kaminari. Which doesn't make sense. There's not enough of a message for the other blonde to make a lick of sense of any of it even if he did happen to catch it. He has a feeling though, deep in his gut that if Kaminari mentions it to him. Ever. That will Endgame for him.

He misses a step.

He stumbled forward, grumbling as he pulls his jacket closer to himself. He heard an unhappy hum from beside him. He glanced up to see Sparky staring at him, concern rolling off of him in waves, but refusing to voice it.

Typical.

The test had been successful though, hadn't it? Katsuki could create the information, he could leave the message, as long as he did not deliver it or intend to deliver it. He could create the clues but he could not convey them. It left him feeling giddy. Even if it didn't do anything. It was a step in the right direction. Katsuki felt strangely empowered by that though.

“Soooooo,” Kaminari drags out the ‘O,’ his golden eyes turning towards him. Katsuki pointedly looks away, but that doesn’t deter the other blonde. “I was going to walk over to eighth street so that I can grab my stuff and Kirishima that carrot cake he likes so much. Do you want to join me?”

Katsuki shrugs.

It really doesn’t matter where he grabs his tea though eighth street is a few blocks passed the convenience store he was gonna hit. If they go up that way, he can grab more items on his list and won’t have to make a trip later. He just wants to go back to bed, but by time they get back, class will be starting soon after.

For a moment he imagines just... making a hot cup of tea and crawling back into bed. His expensive soft comforter the Hag had bought him last Christmas holiday. The Hero tutorials subscription Pops always made sure he had so he could listen on his runs and going about the town. ‘You can always learn something, whether it be large or small, from a new voice, Katsuki. Even if you don’t realize it at the time.’ Turn it on and just doze to the soothing sounds of lectures lulling him to sleep.

It would be nice to feel rested for once.

He can’t give in to such stupid urges though. That means becoming one of the lesser motherfuckers who always have an excuse for why they can’t fix a problem now, why they can’t study now, why they can’t work now, why they can’t do what needs to be done.

Why they have to steal his fucking tea instead of going out into the cold.

It seems stupid in light of recent events. It’s just a drink. It’s just a little lack of comfort, a little lack of sleep, there’s no real issue here, if he’s being honest. There’s really no reason for him to get to fucking pissy about it. He can deal, but this is something that he can control. His actions and his decisions in his everyday life.

To get out of bed.

To make the right choices.

Bit and small.

To make the hard choices.

Big and small.

He can't... he can't just... give up. It's not who he is. He won't roll over to take those twenty extra minutes of sleep and he won't steal someone else's stuff to make his own life easier. He won't allow himself things like that because he wouldn't have let himself before all this shit. And making sure he doesn't change is important to him right now.

Making sure he doesn't change, doesn't chose the easy route, helps him to reassure that he won't take the easy route for the more important shit. For the really bad shit coming.

He can't slow down and let it happen. He walks to the store to get his tea even if he doesn't want to because he refuses to back down, to put things off for later. It's how he is in everything he does. That's how he will always be.

Always.

And yeah, maybe it is petty shit now, but it will help for later.

He can't give up on fighting the Doctor.

No matter what.

He trips again. This time he feels hands grabbing his shoulder, steadying him. He looks up to see golden eyes that are too wide and lips that are tight instead of the usual stupid grin. Kaminari looks genuinely upset now.

Katsuki shrugs the hold off, pulling away. His friend looks unsure and irritated and resigned all in one go. Kaminari doesn't understand though. Katsuki needs to do this on his own.

It's fucking stupid, needing to get tea on his own, but he doesn't have anyone to help him with the bigger stuff so he can't rely on anyone for the smaller stuff either. Because asking for help for the stupid stuff might open up that chasm Katsuki knows is lying in wait. The one that's screaming for help and clawing at the edges, begging and sobbing like a monster in his chest. If he lets that monster out then there will be no making it go back in. Letting it out would destroy him because she would ensure that it never truly escaped.

So it would be in his head, the screaming, but it would have no way out.

So he has to do this one small thing on his own. Even if it hurts. Even if it's stupid. Because it proves to himself that he's not a victim and that he is still fighting in some small way. He's still fucking fighting.

"Do you know what I dreamed about last night?" Kaminari asks. He's looking straight ahead as they walk. Katsuki focuses on putting one foot in front of the other, finding Kaminari's voice has an annoying quality to it that's striking straight through the pounding headache he still has from his nightmare morning to hit his brain. His grip on his jacket tightens again.

It's not Kaminari's fault.

"I dreamed that the Namu's were hunting us inside the dorms." All the air rushes out of Katsuki's lungs. His head snaps over to Kaminari whose eyes are still focused ahead. Eyes squinting against the bright light of the sun. "Just dragging us out of our rooms by our elbows and

legs and not a single one of us can use our quirks for some reason.” Kaminari shrugs, turning to him now and smiling, though it’s stretched too wide and looks like it actually hurts. “Stupid, right?”

Katsuki bites the inside of his cheek. Shit. He’s not good at this comforting shit. Not this gig. But fuck if he’s gonna let the idiot keep that stupid look on his face.

“Yeah, kind of,” Katsuki finally answers. “They wouldn’t be able to fit inside the dorms.”

A breath of air escapes Kaminari, who stopped in shock. A small noise that might be a laugh escapes from him.

“Did you... did you just make a joke?”

Katsuki shrugs.

He makes jokes all the time. It’s not his fault that these losers can’t recognize humor when they see it. Too busy taking shit too literally. Acting like everything he says is a personal slight against them. Fucking ridiculous.

Kirishima was the only one who ever fucking picked up on shit. At least Iida, Todoroki, and Yaoyorozu had the excuse of being fucking little rich shits with no social interaction to teach them otherwise. No one else had that excuse.

Somewhere out there was a trophy room with Deku’s name engraved in every plaque lining the walls; winner every god damn year for least capable of taking a fucking joke, ability to duck and dodge Katsuki’s meaning like it’s his fucking job to do so, and for a spine made of wet noodles thrown in acid.

Fucking Deku had been around him since they were both in diapers and that rock for brains had never picked up on his sarcasm and hyperboles or his clever as fuck puns. Hopeless loser. Like he actually,

genuinely wanted a broom to die. So fucking clever with his analysis yet no god damn common sense. Throwing himself in front of Villains attacks and breaking his fucking limbs every few weeks. No survival instincts and no common sense. The hero community was fucking doomed if Deku was to take fucking golden boy All Might's place.

Chosen One his ass.

"You're right." Katsuki drew out of his thoughts to see Kaminari looking back at him. Kaminari's lips were pressed tight as he fiddled with the strap of his bag. "The Nomu's would be too large to get in and there's nothing that could disarm all of our quirks at the same time and as long as there's at least one of us then..." Golden eyes practically dig into him.

"...then there's not a chance that they could ever touch us. There's no way that anyone in the League of Villains could get near us without our teachers or classmates knowing." Katsuki blinked slowly.

Did this just turn into a pep talk? Was Kaminari trying to comfort him? What the fuck?! Had he been tricked?! Did this motherfucker just lie to him to get him to talk? Did he even have a fucking nightmare last night? This piece of shit.

Fucking making him feel concerned for fucking nothing.

"You..." Katsuki breathes out sharply. "You. Utter. Dunceface."

"Hey, hey! What the hell? That's so unnecessarily mean!"

"And you're unnecessarily stupid."

He stops as he realizes their outside of the store on eighth street. He turns and walks in, hearing Kaminari's loud denouncements of their friendship. Sure. And Mineta was a charming gentleman to women. Sparky will be at his heel again before they even leave the goddamn

store.

Katsuki grabs three boxes of his tea and a bunch of spices to replace in teach bags because yes, he's a petty bitch, and he will spend an hour preparing this shit tonight. And it will be one-hundred percent worth it even if he doesn't witness it himself. Stealing his fucking tea. Out of their goddamn minds.

It's gonna be fucking glorious.

He grabs all the heating and cooling pads. For the leftover pain and fevers, respectively. Water bottles. Notebooks since his are almost full. He goes back and grabs three more because he figures Deku was probably running out of room in his own. Kirishima needed more bandages for boxing since the idiot ruined his last pair and Katsuki would not put it passed the idiot to try to use those ruined ones and accidentally giving himself an infection. He grabbed girl pads for Horns since she kept fucking forgetting to pick them up until she was fucking bleeding everywhere. Didn't girls have some sort of a clock for this shit? Moronic.

He grabs more breakfast items and debates for a minute before grabbing an electric kettle he can keep in his room for tea. He's learned his lesson and he's not waking up in the middle of the god damn night or in the morning to another tea-less cupboard. Real tea. Not herbal shit. He's grumpy enough now without ruining his fucking morning routine.

The others better be fucking grateful to him for his own foresight. He's practically saving their lives here.

"Erm... isn't that a bit much?" Kaminari calls.

"I thought we weren't friends anymore," he snaps back.

Sero's an ashy motherfucker so he grabs more lotion too because he remembers the guy was running low Thursday and knows he's not going to remember to get more until he's squeezing the thing to death in a vain attempt to get just one more use out of it. He'll keep it in his locker and lord it over the idiot for a bit about not thinking ahead before he gives him this one.

Kaminari is right, of course, it ends up being a lot of fucking bags and while the weight is something he can handle, the sheer amount of them makes him a bit unbalanced as he walks down the street. Sparky has one sole bag and a set of toilet paper with him that probably won't last him more than a week or so. Katsuki is tempted to scoff and call him out on the idiocy of buying supplies that won't last, but Kaminari is the type of little shit to call him out on his own mistake of buying too much.

So he keeps his own mouth shut.

It's easier anyways. Avoiding conversing with people means less interaction period. It's easier to let his mind go blank and to focus on what's in front of him than to deal with other people and their bullshit.

Like imaginary nightmares.

He has his own occasionally- fucking laboratory mad scientist gig that likes to play on loop in his head. Not nearly as often as Kirishima and the idiot patrol seem to think. Letting them believe what they want keeps them away from the truth though, so he has yet to deny or mention it.

"So what do you do when you can't sleep?" Kaminari asks casually.

A noise of frustration escapes Katsuki's throat.

"Would it kill you to enjoy the silence?" He growls.

Kaminari hums, adjusting his hold on his single bag almost mockingly. Katsuki's eye twitches. This is what he gets for being generous. He should know fucking better.

"Not when it's coming from you," Kaminari answers just as casually. "Not when it's been dragging on this long. Come on, it's a simple question, what do you do?"

Katsuki is tempted to send a blast at Sparky, but his hands are too full to do anything more than glower.

“I...”

He catches sight of silver. He stops dead in his tracks and feels his throat close up on him. Kaminari has stopped too and is looking at him in confusion. He hardly notices though. His eyes solely on a face that looks painted on over gaunt features. A natural smile, but movements that are stiff.

“Katsuki!” The voice is warm and friendly, like tinkling bells. His whole body is frozen in shock. He’s crushing the bags in his arms and he’s not sure...

“Bakugou?” Kaminari asks, saying his surname for the first time in weeks.

“Oh gosh,” the woman says sheepishly. “It’s been a while since I last saw you. You’ve grown so much!”

Rheina steps towards him and Katsuki steps back. He can’t taste ash though. Why is she here? What does she want? Has she come to take him? Is she going to make him do something here and now? Panic courses through. Something falls out of his bag, but he doesn’t notice as he moves back further from her reaching hands.

Kaminari looks alarmed, eyes moving from the woman to Katsuki and back again before his face hardens. With one smooth motion, Kaminari is right next to Katsuki, standing in front of him with his hands held out, electricity sparking.

Rheina’s brows are knitted in ‘confusion’ as she looks at Kaminari, tilting her head just enough that she can see Katsuki.

“Katsuki,” there’s a whine to her voice, a warning. “What’s going on?”

Are you angry with me?"

"I don't know who you are," Kaminari says evenly, "but you're not welcome here."

"Oh, I don't... understand. Have I done something wrong?" Rheina asks slowly, looking at the sparking hands nervously. Katsuki can't speak. He's trembling. Blast it all, he's... he's terrified. He's fucking frozen.

She sighs, something long suffering and tragic. The dark bags under her eyes making her look sickly. Is that because of him? Is that a side effect of the quirk she has on him, silencing him?

"Fine. I see you're still holding a grudge against me," she said, her lips pressed tight together, weaving a lie as easily as s breathed, before puckering in a pout that doesn't look natural on her face, on the image he has of her. "Take care Katsuki. Do be a good boy, okay?"

She waves cheerfully and for a split second he feels the ash choking him.

She has to know what he did.

About the message he'd tried to infuse in the AI program.

Fuck.

"Bakugou..." Kaminari said, far more serious than he's heard him since the provisional exam. "Bakugou, what was that? She..."

Golden eyes look at him, too wide filled with concern.

"Why were you afraid of her?"

Katsuki coughs, half expecting grainy blackish dust to spill out from his mouth. When nothing like that does, he looks behind him where Rheina went. Sweat slides down his face and his hands are still shaking.

He curses as he tries to get ahold of himself.

It had been less than 12 hours since he'd used the program. He knew from those few moments he'd almost slipped that she was aware instantaneously when he spoke. Was it different if he didn't intent to show it to someone? Or had she herself been unsure on how to proceed? Did she decide coming to see him was more of a threat? Which... if he's fucking honest, his heart feels like it's trying to thrust itself out of his chest and into the streets. She damn well succeeded. Was this just another tactic then? Katsuki hates himself for not blasting her the moment he saw her, but there was something in him that froze. Something that slid up his spine and grasped ahold of all of his bones and melded there to keep him in place. Like a god damn coward.

He looks around, 'too fast, too fast... your eyes don't take things in when you look that fast.'

"Can you hear me?" Kaminari asks.

He can't answer. He can't breathe. His knees give out and he's gasping for air. Fuck. Holy shit. Was that part of the plan? Did he fall for her fucking plan? But she could have just commanded him to attack her. Was she just testing him? Wanting to know how he would react?

"Hey man, hey, it's okay. Whoever she was, she's gone. Kacchan... Bakugou! You need to breathe with me, okay? Match my breathing."

Fingers scramble around his hand, squeezing, they pull his hand up to Kaminari's chest, over his heart. He feels the heartbeat underneath. He can't relax though. He feels his eyes moving around them, looking at the street and the alleys and on top of the roofs around them. She's here. The Doctor is probably too. Maybe the League. He needs to...

What? What can he fucking do? Was this just a demonstration of power? Another form of pushing him to the edge? Or did she have something she'd wanted to tell him in person?

A hand grabs his chin and forces him to stop moving.

"I'm here. Can you breathe with me?"

His eyes go up to the familiar golden orbs. He can feel his body shaking. He can't...

"In. One. Two. Three. Four. In. Yeah? Come on. Count with me. Hold. One. Two. Three. Four. Out. One. Two. Three. Four. In..."

Katsuki sits there for a long time unsure of when he'd sat down on his knees, feeling his vision go in and out as he listens to Kaminari's voice. As he tries and fails and tries again to follow the simple instructions. He's so tired. He feels like if he bent down and just... just laid his head down for a second.

His breathing evens out, but his trembling remains.

He wasn't prepared.

Fucking tea. His last desire of free will had been tea and revenge.

From his bag, Sero's lotion fell out, popping open as it hit the ground and spearing Kaminari's shoes and socks with a wild spray of goop.

'Well, that's lovely,' Denki thinks as he grabs Bakugou by the shoulders and helps him up. 'What the hell is going on?'

Bakugou. Katsuki freaking Bakugou is shaking. That woman, she'd sent him into a panic attack just from her presence. Denki scanned the

area, pulling out his phone at the same time.

His phone rings and it feels like its echoing in the empty streets. Secluded in the early morning.

“What?” Comes Aizawa’s grumpy voice.

“I need your help,” he cuts to the chase. “Bakugou and I went to get stuff from the store on eighth street.”

He can already hear Aizawa putting his shoes on.

“What happened?”

“There was this woman... Sensei... Sensei, Bakugou’s terrified of her.”

There’s a pause on the phone.

He can hear the rush of wind and knows that the man will be here soon.

“She just seemed like a normal civilian, but Bakugou was acting as if... he’s having a panic attack, Sensei.”

It was all out of whack.

This wasn’t right.

“Bakugou, come on Blasty McSplody,” Denki says to his friend who hasn’t said a word. He’s staring blankly at the ground and isn’t reacting to anything Kaminari has said so far. “You’re freaking me out, man.”

“What’s wrong?” Aizawa asks sharply.

“He...” Bakugou gagged against him. Denki almost dropped the phone, his hands reaching out to steady his friend. “Shit. Shiiit. He’s not... I think he’s in shock? Maybe? He’s not responding to anything I say.”

“I’m almost there.”

“Okay. I’m hanging up,” Denki warns. There’s no response so he assumes that’s okay. He calls Kirishima, waking the guy up from a dead sleep, but he can’t feel guilty about it because the guy would skin him alive if he found out any other way.

“Do you know how ear...”

“Get your ass to eighth street right now!” Denki snaps. “Right freakin’ now.”

He can hear Kirishima stumbling out of bed and slamming into things. He hangs up. He has Bakugou bundled in his arms and he’s not sure how that’s going to work out for his future health. He feels even more off guard and unprepared than during their exams.

“Hey, uh, it’s going to be okay, alright? She’s not here anymore. Whoever the hell she is, I’m not going to let her get near you, okay?” He lets off a few electrical sparks in his hands as if to prove his point. He hopes it does.

“Who the hell could scare him like this? What the hell is happening?”

Bakugou faces Villains ten times his size and doesn’t so much as flinch. He freaking smiles like he’s won the lottery or something. He’s crazy when it comes to fighting. A Berserker or something. Bakugou has come back from being attacked and kidnapped, from facing really scary villains, six to one no less, and even fighting All Might without

so much as faltering.

He doesn't get scared.

But.

Aizawa lands, his nose scrunching up, no doubt smelling the puke. He must catch sight of the sheer panic surely reflecting on his face because he doesn't approach with his normal confidence.

"Bakugou?" Aizawa asks, moving slowly towards them.

Cautious.

Bakugou blinks hard before he looks up, still out of it, gently pushing Denki away and stumbling like a drunkard to his feet, holding way too hard onto the bags still. It takes him way too long to focus on Aizawa. He grabs at his own shoulders and looks around, Denki realizes he's hugging the bags, in a way hugging himself, the image so foreign and strange that it leaves him gapping. He can see when a spark of that earlier panic returns to Bakugou, the way he keeps looking around as if expecting an attack.

Bakugou always looks put together, even when he looks like absolute shit, but not right now.

Right now he looks about two seconds away from tearing his own hair out.

"She's gone!" Denki calls. "She's not here anymore. It's okay."

Denki doesn't know if that's what Bakugou needs to hear. He's kind of lost in what to do and what he should say. Bakugou's eyes focus on him for only a second before they go back to looking around.

“Why don’t we head back to UA?” Aizawa says calmly, carefully, like he’s handling a wounded animal instead of one of his students. They joke about Bakugou being the Beast of class 1A, but it’s not really true.

Denki watches in worry as Aizawa tries to put his hand on Bakugou’s shoulder, but he pulls away, walking unsteadily towards UA on his own two feet. Though looking down. He’s avoiding looking them in the eyes.

Denki feels as if he’s had the rug ripped out from under him.

What. The. Fuck.

What the actually fuck.

He takes in a shaky breath, dragging his hands through his hair before picking up the lotion and snapping it shut. Grabbing his own much smaller bag.

“BAKUGOU!”

And there’s Kirishima running down the street towards them.

Denki can see what his friend plans to do and rushes forward to stop him from bombarding their friend. Kirishima is still dressed in his pajamas, crocks the only thing protecting his feet in this cold, hair down and suffering from a serious case of bedhead.

“What’s going on?!” Kirishima hisses.

“I’ll tell you about it when we’re back at the dorms. Do you think you can just...” Denki weakly gestures towards Bakugou. “Can you calm him down or do your thing that you do?”

“Bakugou?” Kirishima takes an certain step towards their friend.

Bakugou turns his head away from him though, as if he’s been physically struck, stumbling through the snow away from them both as he walks in front of Aizawa.

“Kaminari, once you’ve dropped off the stuff, I want a full report from you,” Aizawa’s voice cuts through the odd tension in the air.

“Yeah, yeah, of course,” Denki says easily.

“Bakugou, hay man,” Kirishima says slowly as he jogs to keep up with Bakugou’s fast pace, think you can give me those bags? I can take them to your room. How does that sound?”

The crumbled, torn bags look as if they are suffering under King Explosion Murder’s hold. The items inside creaking and tearing from the death grip on the. When Bakugou finally acknowledges them and releases the bags into Kirishima’s custody, Denki’s not sure if anything really made it out fully intact.

“Thanks buddy,” Kirishima says calmly. “Rough morning, huh? How ‘bout we spar after class today? I’ll let you practice that spinning thing Midoriya told me you pulled on him on me. He says you’re trying to get the rotation tighter.”

Denki marvels at the way Bakugou has turned and appears to actually be listening. Still tense and stiff, his arms folded in front of him and not saying a word, but he isn’t looking around in a panic anymore. He isn’t looking like a fight or flight poster child or like the devil itself is hot on his tail.

He glances at Aizawa, but the man looks as neutral as ever. Hands in pockets, eyes ahead. Though he gives himself away in the way he scans the area and walks slightly sideways so that he can easily look behind them.

Denki does the only thing he really can do.

Fall in line.

It's a bit frustrating because he feels like any of the others would have handled this better. Hell, Kirishima was handling this with ease, as if this was second nature to him. Denki had panicked and sure, on paper it probably looked like he'd done all the right things. He wasn't an idiot despite what many would say.

But it hadn't felt like he'd done the right thing.

Nothing had been right about what just happened. Should he have taken her in? Anyone who scared Bakugou needed to be brought in. He was sure. But for what? That reaction had spoken of trauma. She'd hurt him. There was no question of that in Denki's mind.

Dark thoughts filtered into his mind.

In what kind of way though? Bakugou had never hesitated to attack a criminal before. A member of the League of Villains. One of the their attackers on I-Island, the USJ, the training camp... Bakugou was always at the forefront, ready to take them all head on without hesitation.

This hadn't spoken of that.

Whoever she was... it felt personal.

Which spoke of a different kind of danger Denki wasn't comfortable thinking about. Abuse kind of danger. Manipulation. As he walked behind Bakugou he realized that while Midoriya talked a lot about his mom and was pretty open about his not so great relationship with Bakugou growing up, that the opposite could not be said for Bakugou.

Bakugou had mentioned his extra classes once. Denki knew the

Bakugou's parents were involved somehow in the design world and that his family was well off even if it was nowhere near Momo, Iida or Todoroki [Jeez they had a lot of rich kids in their class].

But other than that, he'd never really heard anything about Bakugou's parents. To be fair, Denki wasn't very fond of talking about his own home life, so had never seen the need to push at other people's.

His dad the boring accountant who was disappointed in lackluster son's academic abilities and suspicious of his motivations to become a hero was not exactly someone who Denki wanted to talk about. So Denki was not exactly interested in prying into that line of discussion unless someone offered information up.

Mina talked about her parents pretty openly whenever the topic came up. Sero had a great dad and sometimes they struggled a bit because his mom had died a while ago while overseas, but they managed. Kirishima was practically illegal in how overly sweet he was in how much he loved and adored his two moms. To the surprise of no one.

One of his mom's was a psychologist, wasn't she? Made so much sense. All those people skills had to come from somewhere after all and Kirishima's natural proclivity for reaching out and helping people probably came from her.

"You did good." Denki looked up to see Aizawa staring at him. "It rarely feels like you've done enough in situations like this. That doesn't change no matter how old get or how much experience you attain. Panic attacks are always hard to deal with."

Denki frowned but nodded.

He was worried about the panic attack, but that wasn't really what had him super concerned. It was the person who'd caused it. He glanced back behind him, but no silver haired babe is anywhere around.

There had been one thing though. One thing that stood out to him.

She'd had dark, blackish blue marks under her eyes. As if she hadn't slept well in a long time. They'd been stark across her pale face in a very familiar way.

They'd matched Bakugou's own eyes.

This time instead of Aizawa questioning him, it's the principle.

Nezu eyes Katsuki like a particularly dimwitted specimen, appraising him and finding him lacking. At least, that's how he feels as he sits waiting for the small creature to speak. He can't even manage the energy to huff in agitation.

He still hadn't had any tea this morning and it leaves him feeling more agitated than normal. The stiff ache in his body still very much there that he knew wouldn't fade for a while longer.

He's never seen the Principle frown outside of the interview he'd been in the wake of Katsuki's kidnapping. He's frowning now though, small eyes seeming to take everything in.

His quirk, Katsuki knows, is High Specs Intelligence. The man- beast-creature... whatever the fuck he is, watches him and is reading more from him than anyone else could.

It makes him feel tense. Waiting for the ash to burn him from the inside out at any given moment because the Principle deduced from his elbow moving right that there is a threat to his school. Or something similarly stupid to give him away.

"This is a rather out of character series of actions you've taken this morning," Nezu says casually. "Mind if I hear things from your perspective?"

"Am I in trouble?" Katsuki asks dryly.

He's recovered a little from earlier and now he's cursing his own idiocy. His own weakness. Fucking freezing up like some weak ass

amateur. Coward. He's a fucking coward. Having a goddamn panic attack in the middle of the street. It was bullshit.

And his hands won't stop shaking.

He's got them pressed tight against his knees, but they still tremble a bit.

This is not how he pictured facing them down. This is not what he's envisioned. Cowering and shaking like a pitiful fucking dog. He clenches his fists, letting off a few sparks to calm himself.

He knows she was expecting his response. She'd planned for it, just as they'd planned everything else. This was just more of their fucked up experimentation. The mind games and physical taxation to push his mental state to the fucking brink.

"You are certainly not in trouble, though it distresses me to know that someone out there might have such a terrible effect on you."

Katsuki holds perfectly still, the small beady, yet perceptive eyes of the principle upon him. Ash fills his mouth. The taste clogs his breath and the urge to not move a single hair overwhelms him. She doesn't want Nezu to get any information from him.

"Should I take that as a confirmation?"

He holds perfectly still.

He doesn't so much as breathe, his eyes meet the principles. He doesn't move and he doesn't breathe. He performs no form of physical communication. No verbal communication. Nothing.

Everything in him wants to satisfy the command being given. Answer the question being asked of him.

“Oh dear.” Nezu breathes. “Alright. I see.”

What the ever living fuck could he ‘see’?

He grits his teeth.

He doesn’t nod. He doesn’t move. He just continues to stare into the Principle’s eyes. He sees the tail twitching in agitation, short, vicious jerks back and forth that reveal what the creature is feeling even if there is a smile on his face. A lot like his own mother when someone’s pissed her off in a work environment. Confined. Calculating in how to respond.

Katsuki doesn’t move and he doesn’t breathe.

“Alright. Why don’t you head back to the dorms?” Nezu says carefully.

Katsuki stands and leaves the office, feeling a tight ball of stress resonating in his chest like an atom about to go nuclear.

“Bakugou!”

He catches sight of red hair, now spiked up, wearing the school uniform now, those awful crocs nowhere to be seen. He oddly misses them. Which is kind of a traumatizing thought that he’s become fond of the god awful shoe wear.

“You missed first period, you okay man?”

Shitty hair says it in a gentle voice. Like he’s not sure Katsuki can handle anything else and he fucking hates that shit.

“Fine.” He grunts out. “I’m going to go get changed and I’m making

my fucking tea before I head to class.”

It’s a warning to drop the tone and an offer.

“Yeah man, I’d like some too. Thanks,” Kirishima says brightly, no hint of the gentle voice.

Good.

He hesitates.

“Does dunceface like tea?” He asks casually.

Kirishima’s smile widens more.

“He likes the fruity kind. He’s got some blueberry lavender in his cupboard.”

Katsuki rolls his eyes. Of course, he does.

“That shit’s not tea.” He grouches. “Your thermos better be fucking clean.”

Kirishima’s smile falters.

“It better not have rotten milk in it.”

“Um.”

“You and your fucking hot cocoas. Forget it. I’ve got an extra thermos. If fruity fucker doesn’t have a clean one either he’s screwed out of my kindness. You’re both hopeless fucking idiots.”

“We are,” Kirishima agreed easily.

“I hate all of you,” he added, as they parted.

“You don’t!” Kirishama disagreed, just as easily.

“None of you deserve me!” Katsuki yelled, just because he could.

“Probably!” Came the yell back.

Katsuki smirked as he heading towards the dorms, making sure no one could see the fond smile that spread across his face.

Chapter 7: Prey

Chapter Summary

In which there is an accident and Dad Aizawa comes in like a motherfucking beast

Chapter 7: Prey

Katsuki knew the day would be long when he walked into the boy's bathroom only to find a pair of pink legs in one of the stalls.

"Horns?"

"Blasty!?"

"Do I want to know?"

"Err... um... you have my back, right?" The nervous stutter was unlike the normally confident member of their group.

"I'm not going to say anything."

"Thanks, you're a pal, but that's not what I meant."

There was a pause of silence and Katsuki sighed.

"You do know my quirk's not mind reading, right?" He said, letting a little bit of irritation show to push things along.

"Right, so, I can't move."

"You need me to unstick you?" Oh, he wasn't going to let her live this one down.

"Don't sound so smug, you asshole, no. I need you to go get me a new pair of pants, underwear, and a tampon for me."

Well, he definitely wasn't smug now.

"Fuck, Horns, really?!"

"Really, really."

"Fine."

He turned around with an impatient huff and opened up the door and froze.

“Scuse me,” Mineta muttered.

Without thinking about it, he swung his leg out, barring the bathroom.

“Nope.”

“What?”

“You’re not going in this bathroom. Use the one on the first floor.”

“What the hell, Bakugou? I’m not going all the way downstairs...”

Katsuki let out a large explosion between his hands, grinning down savagely.

“Then I guess you’ll just have to piss yourself.”

Mineta scowled. But the little shit turned and stomped down the hall.

“This is why no one likes you!” Mineta yelled out, grumbling darkly under his breath.

Katsuki waited a moment, to make sure the short little perve wouldn’t simply come back when he left before opening the door again.

“For the record,” Ashido told him quietly, “I very much like you.”

Katsuki grunted as he closed the door behind him.

Horns, like the rest of these fucking idiots, always left her door unlocked. He got it. They were superheroes. And yeah, all the girls were trustworthy enough, but there were certain guys in their class he wouldn’t trust with privacy.

He kept his own door locked at all hours for obvious reasons.

He twitched at the gaudiness of the room. Stepping softly on the carpet covered in hearts to look for the tampons. He should have asked where they were, instead of pawing through her stuff. He grabbed a pair of pants and underwear, tossing them in a lime green bag with black dots on it then padded over to her bathroom, finding the tampons in the third drawer next to... eye curlers and hair

straighteners. Though he'd never seen Ashido's hair straight so either she hasn't felt like it or, more likely, she didn't know how to correctly use the damn thing.

He swung the bag over his shoulder, closing the door behind him and turning to leave when he nearly ran into Uraraka. They both took a natural step back, Katsuki hitting Ashido's door and Uraraka tapping against the wall opposite. She looked him up and down suspiciously before her lips pressed tightly together.

"I know you have a good reason," she announced. "So I'm not going to ask."

Then she continued walking to her room and went in without another word. Katsuki stared before moving on. Uraraka was pretty decent, even if she could be an overly moralistic pain in his ass about Deku.

There were no more incidents on his way to the boy's restroom upstairs. Though Tokoyami was in the restroom when he got there. Bird brain didn't seem to know what was up and from his spot he could tell that Horns at least had decided to lift her feet up so no one could see her very recognizable pink legs. He waited for Tokoyami to leave before sliding the bag under the bathroom door and standing guard outside.

"Bakugou!"

Uh. Four eyes.

"Mineta tells me you are barricading the men's restrooms." And there goes the stupid arms thing. "Do you care to explain yourself?"

Katsuki leaned harder into the frame, sizing Iida up.

"No."

The class president went red in the face.

"This is extremely unbecoming of one of our top students! Your attitude..."

Horns opened the door, clutching her lime green bag. Iida stopped short. His mouth opening and closing. Ashido looked like she was going to die of embarrassment. Katsuki scowled. Then, in a movement that was too quick for him to stop, she stood on her tippy toes and kissed him on the cheek.

“Thank you, Blasty.”

And then cowardly ran away down the hall.

“What the hell?!”

She laughed, giving him a salute as she disappeared around the corner. He pushed off from the frame and intended to do the same, but a hand wrapped around his forearm. His head snapped around to stare at Iida who looked remorseful.

“I’m sorry I misjudged you. I should know to trust you more.”

Katsuki scowled, ripping his arm out of Iida’s hold.

“Whatever.”

“We all know you’re a good person, Bakugou, you should not put so much effort into convincing us otherwise.”

He flipped him off. The only response he got was a quiet chuckle and the sound of Iida’s footsteps going in another direction. Puh. Acting like he fucking knows him. Stick up his ass didn’t know shit.

It’s a bad night. Not the worst, but it lasts a long time. He loses count of the songs and when he wakes he is covered head to toe in sweat. It sticks to his forehead and every inch of him is- not in pain, but heavy. He feels weak. Like he’s just finished the Sports Festival or something. Like he’s just been rescued in Kamino.

His whole body moves like rusted metal hinges.

When light finally begins to filter through his window, he’s ashamed to admit he hisses at it. He hisses at the god damn sun. Christ. He forces his body into the shower, stripping down one article and elbow at a time.

He’s unstable on his feet and the warm water only helps marginally with his alertness. Vaguely he’s aware that class is going to start very soon, but he can’t make himself give a fuck. He’ll get their in his own time or not at all.

The edges of his vision go dark for a second and Katsuki finds his

hands grasping for a hand hold. The bathroom spins sickeningly around and he holds tight onto the soup stand to wait it out, but it doesn't stop. He slips.

His head cracks against linoleum.

Ice is hitting his face. Pain like a sledgehammer strikes repeatedly against his brain. Throbbing as he blinks the darkness away. Like moving through tar, he turns his head to see its not ice... it's the shower. Running so long that the water has run cold. He fingers fumble as he turns it off.

'Fuuuuuuuuuuuuck...'

The single exploitative runs through his head on repeat. A singular declaration of his feelings in that moment. He clutches on to those feelings as he takes note with bleary vision that the world is silent.

He doesn't hear Kirishima getting ready for classes or Shoji moving about across the way. He tries to move but finds himself strangely- not so strangely, but frighteningly weak. He forces his limbs to work, shaking them to get rid of the pins and needles and numbness running through them.

He does not get out of the bathtub.

Rather, he flops out of it. Hitting the floor softly and crumbling in a shivering heap made worse by the cold tiles lining the floor. With stiff fingers he finds his shirt, pulling it over his head before frowning down at the streaks of blood now covering it. He touches his head and flinches. Yeah. That's bad.

He fumbles with his sweats, feeling a sense of relief now that he's covered, not quite so vulnerable. He does not stride to his room. He crawls. Pulling his blanket off the bed and feeling his teeth chattering enough to shatter as he wraps it around himself.

Then, with dread, he reaches for his phone.

Shota Aizawa rubs the bridge of his nose hard enough that the skin under his eyes drag down. There have been a number of reasons over the years that students don't show up to class. Sometimes they skip or oversleep, sometimes they get sick or there are issues at home, any number of reasons. He learned to simply plow on with lessons.

The concern persists though.

He would not be so worried if it were Shoji or Tokoyami or Kaminari or any number of his students, but its one of his problem students. Which, as history tends to dictate, means that there's probably a problem. The panic attack nearly five weeks ago sits at the back of his mind like a flaring alarm. He's tried several times to get Bakugou to open up to him, but it wasn't working. Aggravatingly stubborn, his explosive student had kept a tight lip on what was bothering him and from what Toshinori has told him, even All Might, the kid's hero, wasn't able to get him to talk. He resolves to go to the dorms at lunch, in between teaching classes, to check on him.

That time never comes though.

He's in the middle of teaching second years close combat techniques when his phone rings. He calls a break as he opens it up and answers it. Ignoring phone calls might be professional in the civilian world, but in the hero community it might be the difference between life and death for someone. It also means trivial phone calls are of less likelihood in their line of work.

"Sensei," Bakugou's voice comes through clear. Every nerve in his body is on high alert, and he finds he's already running towards the dorms. Ignoring his students calls. "I... sh-shit." The words sound off. Was that a stutter?

"What is it? What's happened?" He demands.

He passes by Ectoplasm, the man taking one look at his face and immediately falling into step behind him.

"It's f-fucking stup-pid..." Bakugou breathes out, voice strained, slurred. "I... fuck... d-don't say a g-god damn word to anyone, okay?"

Its not stuttering. Its shivering. Teeth clicking against each other.

"Tell me."

"I slipped... i-in the shower, o-okay?! I hit my head. It k-knocked me

out.”

“Can you move?”

“Yeah.” There’s an uncertain note to his student’s voice and Shota curses deciding against checking on his student this morning. Its Bakugou. He should have known not to ignore his instincts. The kid is consistently early and his dedication to classwork would classify him as a nerd if he wasn’t so... Bakugou. “There’s a lot of blood though.”

They make it to the dorms and Shota doesn’t bother to use the front door, using his weapon to propel him to the second story window, slipping the window open easily. Ectoplasm follows without question.

Bakugou’s door is locked and he kicks it in without hesitation.

What he sees on the floor makes his heart skip a beat. Bakugou is leaning against his bed, blanket wrapped around him tightly. His lips are blue and there’s a nasty gash along the right side of his forehead, highlighting a large bump that’s already turning a blackish blue in color. He can hear his teeth chattering from where he’s standing.

“I will go inform Recovery Girl to prep a bed,” Ectoplasm announces, now that he can see that there’s nothing here that would benefit from his assistance. The man’s eyes linger on Bakugou a moment, white teeth stretching backwards in a manner Shota knows means he’s angered this has happened. The man has never done well witnessing a student get hurt even in such a capacity as this. It was why he’d never attended the Sports Festival. He was a bit of a coddler. Stopping fights before anyone was injured too badly.

Shota bends down in front of his student, carefully checking him over for any additional injuries, tilting his head and checking the bones along his spine and neck to make sure the fall didn’t do more damage than what he could immediately see. He makes Bakugou follow the movement of his finger and feels alarm when they can’t.

“You definitely have a nasty concussion,” he announces. Shota can feel how cold the boy’s skin is, which is concerning since he normally runs a few degrees hotter than his classmates. “When did this happen?”

Bakugou shrugs.

“I-I jumped in the shower as s-soon as I w-woke up. A l-little passed dawn?”

Shota curses. That was hours ago. He doesn't bother to ask him if he's capable of standing. Katsuki Bakugou would never have called him if he could drag himself to Recovery Girl.

"I'm going to pick you up."

It's a testament to how bad the situation is that Bakugou does not protest. At all.

"C-can we go the long way around? I feel f-fuckin' stupid. I don't..."

Normally Shota would scold his students for putting pride above health, but this is Bakugou. The kid doesn't trust people. He doesn't ask for help. He doesn't talk to people. He doesn't want to damage how far he's come.

"Oh course," he tells him, then leaning forward to look him in the eye, he adds. "Thank you, for calling me."

'Thank you for allowing me to help you.'

This could have gone very bad if Bakugou had decided to crawl into bed rather than get help. Carefully, he picks his student up, blanket and all. Bakugou's entire body is wracked with violent trembling. Bakugou's head lolls onto his shoulder instantly, sending alarm bells off in his head. The blood is on absolutely everything and Shota realizes with dread that he's probably been losing blood the whole time.

He takes the window again. Forgoing gentleness for speed. Bitter cold bites into them and Shota hugs Bakugou close to him as he leaps towards the infirmary on the third floor, using his bandages to make the travel as fast as possible. When he pops open the window, its to see Recovery girl already ripping open heating pads and setting up an IV drip.

"Set him down."

Ectoplasm stands in the background, arms folded, face long. Shota watches as Recovery Girl turns Bakugou's head, kissing it gently before checking his vitals.

"How long?" She directs her question at Shota.

"Since early morning."

“What is your blood type?”

“B Negative.”

There was a sigh.

“Ectoplasm?”

The hero across the room, arms loaded with more warming clothes, looks regretful.

“AB Positive.”

Recovery Girl muttered darkly under her breath.

“Ecto, please go get All Might for me. I have a few blood types here for this type of situation, but I recently used all of my A Positive donations for a few reckless Third Years.”

“Yes, madam.”

Bakugou grimaced, curled up on the bed with half a dozen heat pads covering his body.

“I-if he asks, I got in a fight with a-another student. D-don’t tell him I lost to a b-bar of soap.”

Recovery Girl chuckled, though there were strained lines around her mouth and eyes as she continued working on him.

“You’re loss to the soap this morning might have been caused by underlying problems,” Recovery Girl muttered.

Shota’s eyes narrowed as he moved closer to the bed.

“What sort of problems?”

“Nutritional, for one, how is it that my quirk is telling me you are ten pounds less than the last time I saw you, Bakugou?”

His neck creaked as he peered down at his student in mounting disapproval.

“Exhaustion, for another,” Recovery Girl continued. “Your body seems to be receiving less oxygen than it should which suggests sleep deprivation. Torn muscles leads me to think you’ve been overworking yourself. On top of the hypothermia you’ve attained through this

morning, your blood sugar is dangerously low. Falling in the shower, is undoubtable because you haven't been taking care of yourself."

"Does it say a-anything else?"

Recovery Girl eyed him in suspicion. Shota himself felt a weariness settling down in his bones. He was obviously going to have to keep a much closer eye on his student than he first believed. He could already feel the sleepless nights sinking in now.

"Should it say anything else?" Recovery Girl demanded, her old, worn voice sounding partly threatening.

Bakugou seemed to sag.

"No."

"Hm."

"I am here!"

Shota twitched as the door flung open and Toshinori slid into the room, his god forsaken yellow suit flowing around his emaciated frame. He could see Recovery Girl physically twitch in annoyance.

"Quiet down, you fool!"

"Yes mam."

Shota sighed.

"Have you been recently sick, Bakugou?" Recovery Girl asked. Though the tone, Shota knew, was more of a statement. Toshinori sat in the corner, a bag of blood slowly filling up. Ectoplasm returning to classes. Shota had decided to stay to discuss things further.

At the moment Bakugou was sitting up in bed to keep himself awake, his eyes drooping every few minutes to lean against his knees. They were finally able to take the heating pads off, though he'd seen his student grab one and tuck in between his legs and chest, keeping the blanket close. Red eyes strayed to Recovery Girl, but he remained silent.

Recovery Girl huffed in agitation.

“Failing to come to me when you are sick is not a form of strength,” she scolded. “You’ve endangered your health through negligence. Now, you seem to be better, but all the signs your body are exhibiting tell me that you have been getting sick often.”

“It’s just a cold I can’t seem to shake,” Bakugou mutters. “It keeps coming back every time I think I’m over it.” The kid shrugs. “Winter’s kind of shit for me.”

Shota pinched the bridge of his nose. He had noticed Bakugou’s up and down moods and the exhaustion that had been affecting his performance but he’d assumed it was nightmares or personal issues. This was why he’d resisted the idea of becoming a teacher. He always assumed to know what was going on in his students minds, what their limits were, what their potential was, and he always ended up making an ass of himself because of it. He was antisocial and unsympathetic and he’d never understand what Midnight was thinking when she recommended him to Nezu to become a teacher.

“I remember,” Toshinori said, nodding slowly, the man wore a deep frown on his face, “you once said you’re at your strongest during the summer so it makes sense that you’re at your weakest in winter. You can’t sweat as much because of the cold and so its harder to work with your quirk. Hence the changes to your suit. I was not aware it affected your health as well. It is unsafe for you to not have mentioned that, Young Bakugou.”

“I’m fine,” Bakugou gritted out, looking down at his lap. His eyes were half lidded. He looked ready to pass out at any time. He added, half heartedly. “It was an accident.”

“An accident that was entirely preventable,” Recovery Girl intoned darkly. She pulled out a number of pill bottles and set them down on the table. “These are vitamins. They’ll help with the nutritional deficiency’s. There’s also a sleep aide and... what type of cold medicine have you been taking?”

“Aspirin for the headaches. Some Nightquill for colds.”

“You’ve been taking two different types of medicines at the same time?” Recovery Girl said sharply.

Bakugou shrugged, his eyes drooping.

Shota felt himself twitch in agitation.

“You know better,” he growled, leveling his student with a hard glare. It was difficult to stay angry though as the kid finally lost the battle and tilted sideways. Toshinori stood quickly, like a startled rabbit, but stayed put because of the needle in his arm. Recovery Girl checked the boy before sighing.

“It seems he’s pushed himself beyond his limits,” she said softly. “The blood loss has been too much for him, on top of everything else.”

Toshinori sat down, looking rather more agitated than Shota had ever seen him.

“I can’t believe we didn’t notice the ‘everything else,’” the man growled. “I never noticed anything off in our training sessions.”

“It can’t be helped,” Shota tried to ease the tension. “All we can do is to perform better in our duties moving forward.”

“Yes, but I’ve been escorting young Bakugou back and fourth to remedial classes and I’ve even been working with him after school hours in the gym,” Toshinori muttered, his voice tight with anger, fists clenched. “How could I not...?”

“And I am his homeroom teacher,” Shota cut in. “I spend just as much time working with him and I didn’t notice things had gotten this bad. We can play the self-blame game or we can work towards being better.”

Toshinori blinked, nodding his head slowly as he looked Shota in the eyes.

“You are right. Thank you. We must learn from our mistakes rather than allow ourselves to wallow.”

“Good. Now, what do you recommend, Recovery Girl?” Shota asked, cutting straight to the point.

“Bakugou can take the vitamins on his own, but I do recommend you make sure he is eating three full meals a day. Losing ten pounds on a frame like his is quite drastic for such a short time period. If the winter months really are this hard on his body then I suggest we take the same precautions with Bakugou that we do with Asui. No outdoor training. Limited time exposed to the cold. A stricter monitoring of his health.”

He glanced at the ash blonde, noting the evident dark circles under his eyes and the way his body had naturally curled in on itself in his sleep. What was he going to do with these kids? If it wasn't the Problem child then it was Bakugou, between the two of them, he was going to have an aneurism before the year was out which was in literally a few weeks.

Holidays were coming up at least.

A little break.

At least until one of them called him about some crises taking place. Like an alien invasion or a peanut allergy or who knew what. Something so utterly stupid and unlucky that Shota would never be able to think of it himself.

No one was ever going to figure it out. He was fucking doomed. Katsuki felt his head as he made his way towards class the next morning. Having slept the rest of the day away in the Clinic before returning to the dorms, Katsuki actually felt rested. Which was odd. Like having spent so long living with a migraine that you didn't even remember what it was like to not have one.

No throb behind his eyes. No fatigue. His body still felt weighed down from last nights sadistic 'conditioning,' but not as bad as normal. His eyes didn't feel like they were made of hot metal and he'd even gotten up early enough to have coffee. Coffee was fucking gorgeous. He'd never had any interest in dating, but he'd be willing to spend the rest of his god damn life having mouth to mouth with this beautiful liquification of sexiness.

He took another sip of the dark liquid, black as his soul, bitter as his heart. Oh yeah. He'd sell Deku for a lifetime of this shit. Or one Flat White. Who was he kidding, he'd hand him over for free.

He chuckled darkly to himself as he opened up the door, picturing tying the nerds hands up with his stupid bunny ears and tossing him on a boat bound for England. Though the crew would either gag him or toss him overboard after listening to an hour of his mutterings. The idiot would probably swim back like a god damn dolphin (or ride back on their backs like the fucking friendly fucker he was). And he'd stomp his way to Katsuki's room all soaking wet and pouting and cross his arms and say something really moronic like... 'That wasn't very nice, Kacchan.'

He snickered, trying to cover it up as he took another sip from his thermos. He was in a good mood for once, pleasant daydreams, good coffee, decent sleep.

This was going to be a good day.

Annnnnnd everyone is staring... Katsuki swallowed, looking around the room with growing annoyance at the collection of wide eyed concern. He checked his watch. He was early. What was their fucking problem? He caught sight of Aizawa sitting at his desk. Not in his sleeping bag. Here. Early.

What had this motherfucking piece of shit done?

“I wish you the best of luck, Bakugou,” Aizawa said calmly, a grin slowly stretching across his face. “I’ve informed your classmates the reason you were absent yesterday is because you passed out from lack of eating.”

His brain checked out for a second, in disbelief of the gull his teacher had, in fury of the breach in privacy. How fucking dare he? That fucking bastard. Suddenly the wide eyed concern looked a hell of a lot more like a collection of predators. And he was the god damn prey.

Chapter 8: Clash

Chapter Summary

In which Bakugou is a stubborn ass and everyone is determined to meet him head on.

Chapter Notes

The latest chapters in My Hero Academia have giving me a lot of new material to work with for this story. I never expected the Doctor to play a big roll in the manga quite so soon. I thought he'd come into play in later arcs. So my story officially needs a warning for manga spoilers* up to chapter 222.

Chapter 8: Clash

Izuku stared at the empty desk in front of him, tapping his finger against his chin in anxiousness. He was in that frame of mind where everything was moving too slow and much too fast all at once. The notebook in front of him was filled with scribbled notes and vague outlines of the people he'd been seeing; the One For All holders. He'd been wanting to ask Kacchan's opinion on it, but he hadn't shown up to class yesterday.

The man with the dark whips quirk was on the current page. Izuku wasn't the best artist, but it showed his strong chin and goggles, the large arms and bald head. He'd known, of course, that the One For All users spanned the globe. It was a coincidence that the last three holders, himself and All Might and his mentor all being Japanese.

The problem was the lack of documentation. Which he understood. If anyone were to figure out how One For All worked, like Kacchan had, then it would be all the more dangerous moving forward. Each time it was passed on was a risk for exposure, but... it was so frustrating that there were eight bearers of One For All and only information on two of them. And All Might didn't like to talk about his mentor too much.

He'd never been very good at fighting off his curiosity though and now that this development had happened- gaining quirks from the past holders, it would have been really nice to know what to expect. The dark whips were so different than the power enhancer quirk All

Might had. What else would show up unexpectedly and how was he supposed to explain it?

‘Course Kacchan was less likely to humor his musings than All Might was. Where All Might had told him there was no way to know what the future holds, Kacchan was likely to hit him and demand how the fuck he was supposed to know and that he shouldn’t waste brain cells on shit that neither of them could predict. So... basically the same thing, but a lot meaner.

He stopped his tapping as he heard the door open, expecting to see the grumpy blonde, but instead seeing a grumpy Sensei. He squinted and checked the time, alarmed to see it was nearly twenty minutes before class was to start. He could hear the murmur among his classmates and when he glanced over he met Ururaka’s worried expression. Aizawa didn’t even have his sleeping bag.

“Morning,” Aizawa mumbled.

Noticeably, it was never ‘good morning.’

Today though, the lack of cheerful tidings was a relief in its familiarity. Out of character arrival aside, this was still Aizawa and not an imposter, if a ‘good morning’ was ever issued, Izuku was pretty sure the teacher would be hit with two or three twitchy students quirks before anything else could be said.

“To answer your unasked question, I am still awake from last night.”

There was a spread of relieved murmuring as understanding made its way through the class. Izuku covered his mouth to hide the snicker and could hear Sero, Jiro, and Kaminari doing the same. Iida’s hand shot up into the air, but did not wait to be called on.

“Sensei! While we all respect and appreciate your dedication to Underhero work and grading our papers on time, is it truly appropriate to endanger your health by skipping entire nights of sleep?”

Izuku cracked a grin at how thunderous Iida’s expression had become. Only the class president would be bold enough to try to lecture a teacher on their behavior.

“Actually,” Aizawa said slowly, the temperature in the room dropping. “Its because of a student’s health that I haven’t slept yet.”

More than one person glanced at Kacchan's seat. Izuku felt all the light heartedness drain out of the room. He glanced at Kirishima who'd spent all of yesterday knocking on Kacchan's door until he'd eventually forced it open to find the room empty. Everyone had been worried, but Kacchan had come marching through the common space as grumpily as always late after dinner. Ignoring questions and muttering darkly to himself, clearly in a foul mood, Kirishima had still walked up to him to talk to him though. Izuku hadn't been privy to the exchange, but the redhead had given them a thumbs up so they assumed everything was alright.

He regretted that now.

"As you are aware, Bakugou was not here yesterday," Aizawa Sensei said carefully. Izuku realized there was a tinge of anger in their teacher's voice. He could see that the others recognized it too.

"Normally I do not condone releasing private information, however, I believe this class will be much more affective working together than I will be working on my own." Izuku did not like that grin. "You are all a bunch of rule breaking brats bent on putting your business where it doesn't belong and for once... I'm going to use that to my advantage."

"I think I just wet myself," Kaminari whispered.

He only sounded half joking.

"Homeroom today will focus on nutrition and proper eating habits for up and coming heroes," Aizawa bit out, slapping down a pile of pamphlets. "You will be studying this for the next three days and on Friday there will be a test."

He heard a moan from most of the class though not a soul questioned it.

"All of you will be helping me keep your classmate in line," Aizawa continued. "Since he saw fit to neglect eating enough that he passed out yesterday."

Dead silence.

Izuku's mouth felt dry. Now every eye in the room was looking at Kacchan's desk. That was... his mind wandered to those times when Kacchan had been late in middle school, when he hadn't arrived at all. He licked his lips, trying to swallow passed the lump in his throat. He clenched his fists, the scars along his hands suddenly itching.

“Apparently,” Aizawa continued, “we will have to take the same precautions with Bakugou that we do with Asui. While Winter does not have as obvious affects on Bakugou as it does on Asui, it is still rather dangerous.” Their teacher glared across the room. “I’ll take this time to remind all of you that if there are any kind of side affects to your quirks now is the time to inform us.”

He heard Sero curse under his breath.

“And if any of you notice Bakugou coming down with a cold or falling sick in any way, you are required to report it, as Bakugou himself has proven he thinks he can win against illness if he just applies enough bullheaded stupidity.”

That got a few snickers from the class even if the over all atmosphere of the discussion left a thick tension about. Izuku tried to think back to the last few weeks though and couldn’t recall any instance of illness. The bout of depression that had lurked around his childhood friend might have hidden it though or did Izuku make a mistake? Could this silent, reclusive behavior been born out of getting sick and not a relapse?

If so then it was partly Izuku’s fault that Kacchan had been able to slide under the radar with getting sick. It was very in character for Kacchan to try to go to school and do training no matter how he was physically feeling. The ash blonde rarely got sick though. Or maybe he’d always been really good at hiding the fact that he got sick often. That sounded like something Kacchan would do.

He grimaced as he thought of their childhood. How up and down Kacchan could be and how sometimes he’d be perfectly fine with Izuku and other times he didn’t want anything to do with him or anyone else. It was entirely possible that Kacchan’s health was less than ideal. It made him think of the conversation he’d overheard all those years ago. This all really just created more questions than answers.

And on top of that...

Kacchan had been showing a lot of concern lately... well. Aggressively spoken perhaps, but in his own round about way it was as concerned as Kacchan got. Helping him train One For All, working with All Might and him to figure out the enemies moves, being... erm, supportive, in his own way.

It hurt to know that Izuku and even All Might were trusting Kacchan

with all of this, yet the ash blonde hadn't trusted them to reach out for help. As always he was trying to handle everything himself when he didn't need to.

'Deku's more of a little shit of a brother than anything.'

The words had stayed with him, warming his heart. They'd come so far from where they'd started this school year. He'd learned so much and they'd come to a better understanding of each other. There were still barriers though. Walls that felt a thousand miles high and too thick to break through. If Kacchan would just...

Someone tapped his shoulder.

He looked behind him to see Mineta with his knee on his desk, giving him an apologetic smile.

"Your mutterings really starting to freak people out," Mineta muttered.

Izuku blushed, looking around to see Jiro hiding a smile behind her hand and Sero eyeing him nervously.

"Sorry."

The door to the classroom opened. Kacchan walked through the door, looking, honestly, better than he has all week. A thermos wrapped between his hands and not quite so sleep deprived. When he caught sight of them all staring, he pulled out his phone before his eyes strayed over to Aizawa in confusion.

Izuku couldn't blame him.

"I wish you the best of luck, Bakugou, I've informed your classmates the reason you were absent yesterday is because you passed out from lack of eating," Aizawa told him point blank.

Izuku winced, knowing how well that was going to be taken.

Then Aizawa pulled out a few nutrition bars, tossing them in Kacchan's direction who caught them easily, looking very much like a pissed off Pomeranian. Teeth bared in fury.

"That's not your fucking business to..."

Aizawa raised both eyebrows.

“I can always elaborate,” Aizawa said slowly, meeting Kacchan directly in the eye. Izuku cringed as Kacchan seethed in anger, glaring daggers at their Sensei as he stomped over to his desk and slumped into the chair. Aizawa was unimpressed, leveling his own glare. “I fully expect you to eat those before the end of class.”

Kacchan’s only response was to angrily rip open one of the nutrition bars and take a savage bite out of it.

“Today, we’ll be going over the nutritional needs of heroes in training,” Aizawa told the class, giving Kacchan a pointed look. Izuku could practically feel the heat radiating from the desk in front of him. Shoulders hunching down and a dark aura hovering in the air.

Izuku sunk into his own chair.

It was going to be a very long day.

Training that day was light sparring.

Katsuki couldn’t figure out who he wanted to skin alive more. Aizawa who kept side lining him in measly fifteen minute intervals. Kirishima who kept getting decked because he couldn’t focus on his own damn matches to glance in his direction. His opponents who were fucking pulling their punches. Or the rest of the extras who were not being subtle at all in their motherfucking staring.

These useless overbearing assholes were driving him insane.

Spending all morning offering him their various snacks like he was some mewling kitten that needed fattening up. It was fucking humiliating. He hated every minute in between classes and had nearly set Sato’s hair on fire when the bastard continued pushing his fucking gross sugary shit in his face.

Did he look like he was fucking anorexic or something? No. He fucking didn’t. He was a gorgeous mound of fucking muscles and toned abs and there wasn’t a single rib showing on his frame. He was probably the healthiest student Aizawa had in this freaking class and this was fucking bullshit.

So what if he’d skipped a few meals here or there.

Katsuki felt his eye twitch as he saw Sero pull back instead of pushing his advantage. He snarled as he moved forward, ramming his knee into Sero's solar plexus. Long limbs stumbled back, a hacking cough sounding quite painful. Katsuki showed no mercy though, hitting him with an upper cut that landed Sero on his back.

"I'll kill you! Don't you fucking pussy foot our match Soy Sauce!"

"Right, right, sorry."

"Damn right!"

It was so frustrating. Going up against first Round Face then Tails and finally Sero and having each one of them hesitate. Like he had to fucking prove himself all over again to be in the ring with them.

He dodged a hit aimed at his chest, twisting around to hit Sero in the back of his neck. He landed it, but got elbowed in the ribs before he could move away fast enough. Those fucking limbs were insane. If Sero packed some muscles on his arms instead of always focusing on his legs, he'd be a much more dangerous opponent.

Katsuki flipped backwards, putting distance between them as he circled around. Sweat slipped down his neck and there was an itch to increase his speed with a few good blasts, but this was no quirks, hand to hand combat training.

Black dots stretched before his eyes for a moment.

Katsuki blinked hard, dodging hits Sero aimed at him with relative ease as he tried to get his vision to come back into focus. He was one of the top students for a reason, after all. A little exhaustion wasn't going to...

"Bakugou! Bench!"

His head whipped around, staring at Aizawa in disbelief.

In that brief moment of distraction, Sero decks him on the right side of his forehead, where he'd hit his head just yesterday. He goes from standing straight to flat on his back in zero seconds flat. The black dots spreading out to encompass all of his sight for a few brief scary moments.

"Fuck," he mutters angrily, shaking his head.

He can hear Sero apologizing profusely. He glares at where he thinks his much taller friend is before sitting up, muttering darkly about stupid, meddling sleep deprived ass holes with more bandages than brains. He stumbles to his feet and stomps off the field, trying to ignore the vertigo slashing its way through his balance like a bad horror movie serial killer.

Someone shoves a water into his hands and he grumpily snatches it from them, not bothering to thank whatever mother hen it is trying to be helpful. He touches the side of his head lightly, but regrets it as the world tilts unpleasantly.

‘Fucking great.’

Here he was, a walking, talking self-fulfilling prophecy. The group of dunderheads working themselves in a tizzy for no real reason. Freaking coddling him and distracting him and causing more harm than good.

The day had started out so well and now it was as shit show.

“Yo! You doing okay?”

He crushed the bottle of water in his hands, recognizing Kirishima’s voice even as the over gelled red hair came into focus.

“Fucking peachy.”

Kirishima sat too close. His shoulders nudging into his. Knees bumping against Katsuki’s own. A look on his face like a recently killed fish slapped onto a ice display. He resisted the urge to bang his head against the wall, knowing it would only make his growing headache worse.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Kirishima demanded.

Here we freaking go.

“Because I have the cognitive ability to fix the problem myself?” He drawled.

“Obviously not, since it happened in the first place,” Kirishima easily bit back. “We’re supposed to watch each other’s backs, right? Can’t do that if I don’t know there’s something to watch out for.” Katsuki snorts.

Oh, if only he fucking knew what was really going on. The thought actual startles a deep sort of manic laugh out of his chest. The thought of Kirishima knowing and proceeding to try to put Katsuki into some sort of iron clad, spiked bubble and standing guard like a demented fucking knight with a vendetta.

Katsuki regrets letting the noise escape his throat because Kirishima looks downright alarmed now. He covers his mouth, reaching for another bottle of water and chugging it to distract himself.

“I just wasn’t paying attention. That’s all.” Katsuki tells him when he feels like he has a better hold of his emotions. “There’s no problem.”

“That’s what you said a month ago when I asked you while we were doing one on one sparring,” Kirishima says darkly. “You’re not alright.”

Katsuki sighed, digging his forehead into his knee.

“Fine. Think whatever you want.”

Katsuki goes to stand up and grunts as the world tilts and his legs give out. He’s falling backwards when he hears his name yelled. Arms grabbing him and lowering him back down.

‘Well, fuck.’

Aizawa is suddenly in front of him and damn it, this just isn’t his freaking day. Exasperation consumes him at the frantic noises going on. He can hear people shouting out questions. He can vaguely see shapes heading towards them. He swallows down the nausea making his stomach roll before gesturing towards his head.

“Sero got me in just the right spot,” he explained, before adding silently and maybe a bit grumpily. ‘And its your fault.’

Aizawa pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Alright, I think we’ll call it a day!” Aizawa announces. “Kirishima, do you mind escorting Bakugou back to the dorms?”

“You can count on me!”

“I don’t need a fucking escort!”

“One more word out of you and I will bench you for two weeks,” Aizawa hisses, stabbing a finger in Katsuki’s chest.

He growls, but doesn't say another word.

In front of Aizawa.

'Oh man,' Hanta thought, glancing at Kirishima, 'Death Con 10: Mother Hen. Never thought I'd see it.'

"I swear to fucking God, Kirishima, I'll fucking cut your dick off and shove it down your damn throat if you don't drop me this instant!" Bakugou screeched, blasting a part of Kirishima's jacket off. The red head's quirk was fully activated though, unbreakable mode making it so Bakugou was basically imprisoned in stone as they walked across campus to the dorms. The rest of the class was giving the five of them a wide birth, despite worried and amused glances.

Bakugou let out an even larger blast and Hanta could only hope that this didn't end in Kirishima bared to the world like a new born. As much as he loved his bro, he really didn't need that image in his head.

"Let me go!"

"Not on your life!" Kirishima shouted back, looking to be struggling against that which was the beast of Class 1A. "You're not training anymore today! We're going to go and have a nice hot meal."

"Ahhhhhhhhhhh."

Hanta jumped back with Ashido, feeling his eyebrows singe as another blast let loose. They shared a glance of unease. Kaminari looked stricken. Arms full of both Kirishima's and Bakugou's bags and shoulders hunched.

"Kirishima, dude, I think you're going too far."

Snow was coming down hard around them, the wind blowing from the north and south, whipping their clothes in all directions and making Hanta shiver. Much to their collective chagrin, Bakugou seemed to be slowing down in his thrashing. He was shivering and the dark circles under his eyes showed starkly against pale skin.

They'd known, of course, they'd been able to see the exhaustion nibbling away at Bakugou's normal beast like stamina. The four of

them had talked about it plenty of times before, assuming the nightmares were still going strong. It hadn't occurred to a single one of them, not one, that there could be other problems.

Finally, as they nearly made it back to the dorms, Bakugou slumped. Hanta tensed as he watched the blonde's head hit Kirishima's shoulder, breathing heavily. The red head tentatively let his hardening go, more to not accidentally hurt Bakugou than anything else. He would have put money on Bakugou pulling some advanced move on Kiri before decking him the moment the blonde felt soft skin beneath him, but when nothing happened and their temperamental friend continued simply breathing raggedly against Kiri's shoulder, dread filtered into his chest.

Kaminari, who was carrying Bakugou's bag alongside his own visibly gulped, meeting Hanta's eyes across the way, lips thinning into a tight line. Ashido ran ahead, grabbing the door and swinging it open with too much force, a flustered blush spreading across her face.

"What's your plan now, asshole?" Bakugou muttered. "You going to finally put me down or you gonna just fucking carry me like a fucking dickwad for the foreseeable future."

Kirishima finally relented, putting Bakugou down in a manner that was so gentle, it was probably insulting. Hanta winced as Bakugou ripped himself from the redhead's grasp, cursing profanities all the way.

"I'm serious, Bakugou, we're all gonna sit down and eat," Kirishima announced loudly.

Why did Hanta feel like he was in the middle of a family feud?

Bakugou flipped them all off, leveling them each with a glare before meeting Kirishima's crossed arms and scowling face, nose to nose.

"I'd ask you why you're acting like my mother but she's never been such a pansy ass bitch," Bakugou growled, snatching his bag from Kaminari who jolted back.

"Maybe that's the problem," Kirishima snapped back.

Every inch of Bakugou went rigged.

"What did you say?"

"I said," Kirishima raised his voice, "that's the problem! You've been doing this on and off for years! And no one, not even your mother, has stopped you. You've been... you've been hurting yourself and no one's batted an eye. We'll that's not gonna happen anymore!"

Bakugou turned, red eyes narrowed to slits.

"Who the fuck..." Bakugou paused, his eyes looking off in the distance, Hanta followed his gaze until they landed on a very frantic looking Midoriya. The blonde's eyes went carefully blank. "Of fucking course. Nosy motherfucking piece of shit... always overdramatizing everything under the god damn sun. Fucking bastard."

"It's not his fault!" Kirishima cut in. "He didn't want us bothering you about this so he warned us off of trying to do this earlier. That was a mistake though. We should never have allowed it to get this bad in the first place."

Hanta carefully moved his body so that he was blocking Bakugou's view of most of their other classmates, including Midoriya.

"This bad?" Bakugou scuffed. "You act like I'm starving or something. I lost a little weight because I wasn't paying attention..."

"I knew it!" Ashido hissed. "I knew you'd..."

"You've lost weight?" Kirishima hissed, looking Bakugou up and down.

Hanta couldn't tell. Bakugou was still stacked with rippling muscles and biceps. Not Kirishima's level, but still enough to leave pretty much everyone else in the hero course in the dust. He was in the top three of Hanta's list of never bench press against. Bakugou rolled his eyes so hard Hanta feared he'd lose them in the back of his head.

"See! This is what I fucking mean! None of you motherfuckers can walk passed a stray cat without claiming its been abandoned and abused even if its just fucking sitting their bathing in the sun!"

"One time," Ashido muttered.

"Get over your fucking selves! Stop making mountains out of mole hills."

Bakugou turned to go to the elevator, only to find Kaminari standing in front of the metal doors, arms folded. Hanta moved in front of the

doors. Ashido in front of the windows. He watched closely as Bakugou sized them each up, as his friend's eyes landed on a smirking Kirishima.

"It's just dinner." Kirishima said slowly. "You said yourself that you aren't purposefully skipping meals so what's the big deal? Now you're being the dramatic one for no reason."

Hanta saw Bakugou grit his teeth.

"I don't need babysitters. I can get my own damn food."

Wordlessly, Kirishima stepped to the side, waving towards the kitchen.

"Tch."

Bakugou sneered as he walked passed him.

"Should we count this as a victory?" Hanta whispered uneasily.

"I sure am," Ashido said happily, prancing into the kitchen after their grouchy, foul mouthed friend.

Hanta rubbed the back of his neck in agitation, watching silently as Bakugou begrudgingly pulled down pans, slapping Kirishima's hands away from touching the stove.

"You culinary fuck ups aren't cooking dinner. Soy Sauce, if you feel like making up for your pussy footing earlier then get your ass in here and help me cut up vegetables!"

"Sure thing Blasty McSplody," he muttered tiredly.

Why were all of his friends so exhausting?

"I can't believe he hasn't murdered us all," Kaminari whispered, a bit more dramatically than the situation warranted.

"It's the only real sign that he's really not feeling his best," Hanta agreed teasingly, cracking his knuckles and popping his neck as he moved into the kitchen. Not one of them let their eyes stray too far from their friend though. Hanta still couldn't shake the sick feeling he'd felt seeing Bakugou go down and not get back up. Seeing him stand and stumble back, eyes rolling into the back of his head. It seemed Bakugou had only retained consciousness through pure stubborn force of will.

"What do you want me to do first?" Hanta asked. He paused as he saw Bakugou gripping the knife too tightly, blinking slowly and staring at the counter top in front of him. Kaminari put his hand on Bakugou's back, dropping the dramatics for real concern.

"You know," Kaminari said carefully, cautiously... "I can make a decent stir fry, if you'll let me?"

Bakugou's shoulder's hunched and there was a look on his face as if he was going to violently reject the idea, but then he sort of tilted a bit. The hand Kaminari had on his back moving instantly to his shoulder to steady him. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Kirishima and Ashido with their hands slightly out stretched, alarm on their faces.

"Fine," Bakugou ground out. "Fine."

It didn't feel like a victory at all.

Katsuki is grateful.

Resentful as hell that he needed it, but grateful none the less. The nap on the couch had done wonders. The food had been decent enough and he'd scraped his plate clean twice. The company though, probably did more for him than anything else. The skin on skin contact as they'd joined him on the couch, warm against his and comforting, as much as he wouldn't admit it. He'd slumped against them like wet clay in the hot sun, melting into the fold of bodies and passing out.

He's vaguely aware they were doing shit around him. Watching a movie or playing video games or some loud shit or other. He knows they dimmed the lights though and he knows others came and went. The curtains had been pulled tight, blocking out the sun.

He feels refreshed when he wakes to everyone else getting ready for a late dinner. There's a tiny pin prick of guilt, knowing his classmates put off having their own meals just because he'd been in the kitchens. He pushes it to the back of his mind though and stretches out all the kinks in his back. Its still light outside so it can't be that late.

A hand grabs his own.

"Where are you going?" Ashido asks, there's a bright smile on her face, but he can see its too stretched.

Fake.

"Calm your tits. I'm going to bed so I don't develop a permanent crick."

She lets go reluctantly.

"Good!" Kirishima calls, standing up and patting him on the back. "By the way, Aizawa says no after school hours training for you until you gain your weight back!"

"Whatever."

It is with every strain of patience he has in his reserve that he doesn't smack Kaminari and Kirishima when they follow him into the elevator like lost puppies. He's seriously too tired for this smothering shit. He pointedly hits the button for Kaminari's floor and he feels a tick of anger when the dunceface just as pointedly ignores the opening and closing of the elevator doors.

Katsuki slumps out at his own floor, hearing the pattering of feet as he pulled out his key.

"Why do you always keep your door locked?" Kaminari whined, but there's a note of suspicion in his voice now.

Katsuki turns to look him in the eye.

"Because sometimes idiots steal shit like mouth guards," he says calmly. Despite the neutral tone, Kaminari flinches at the accusation, his eyes trailing to stare at the wall.

Kirishima pats Kaminari's shoulder comfortingly.

"I've got that new manga volume you wanted to check out in my room. It was delivered yesterday," Kirishima tells him. The bright blonde immediately perks up and Katsuki can't help but snort as he turns his doorknob and enters his room.

And freezes.

Tar lines his desk.

His eyes narrow to slits at the familiar smell of ash and something foul... something rotting. Kirishima is smiling in the hall, talking to Kaminari and they both look as if they have every intention of walking into his room after him. They're turning... moving towards him with smiles on their faces. His heart constricts. Throbs.

He slams the door and locks it.

There's disgruntled noises on the other side and he hears Kaminari cursing loudly, but Katsuki is paying too much attention to what's on his desk to care too much about that. There's a piece of paper on the desk. A small slit that looks innocent enough, but Katsuki knows where it came from.

"Go read your picture books!" Katsuki calls. "I'm going to bed!"

He's proud to say he can't hear the panic that's thrumming through his body.

"Alright," Kirishima says reluctantly. "Just... I'm right next door, okay? If you need me..."

"Yeah, yeah, I got it."

He can handle a stupid piece of paper. Thank you very much. Just a dinky stupid little piece of fucking dead tree. He just needed to stop being a pansy coward and see what it said. He waits until he hears the soft pad of footsteps walking away before he unclenches his fists. He lets his school jacket drop onto his bed, takes his shoes off, tries to still his shaking hands. He takes a long swig of his water bottle before marching over to the small scrap on his desk, reading the words scrawled in messy handwriting.

'Take a deep breath.'

He doesn't have time to scream.

One second he's staring at the words, brow scrunching up in confusion, and the next it's coming. Seeping out of his mouth and wrapping around his body. He drops the paper, grabbing at his throat. The foul stench of death and ash swallowing him completely.

And then he's gone.

A few drops of tar in front of his desk the only signs he was there at all.

Chapter 9: Play Time

Chapter Summary

In which Katsuki's choices suck and Kirishima is an A + friend.

Beautiful Artwork in this chapter created by: kklol2

You can find them on Tumblar here: <https://www.tumbral.com/blog/fevredayz>

Really great work!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Chapter 9: Play Time

It's the worst kind of déjà vu. The feeling of slime suffocating him from the inside out. Grasping at his body, prodding it, violating it. It's a feeling he'd hoped to never experience again, an image of All Might reaching out to him, trying to grasp hold of him.

And then All for one.

This time though, instead of darkness and concrete, the sky is too bright and his feet dig into soft mud. He retches on the ground, all the food those idiots forced on him coming up with the black goo. His stomach rolls and he vomits again.

His shoulders convulse in repulsion.

He stands on shaky legs to see where he is, shivering as wind hits his back and sends a chill down his spine and along his skin. He's out in the open, large rock formations dotting the horizon and a mud like ground stretching outwards with vine like plants poking out here and there. Katsuki frowns as he turns around in a circle, finally spotting a radio some feet away, sitting on top of a large rock.

"I'm so happy that you could join me, Katsuki Bakugou."

He tenses up. He'd known this was the Doctor, but it's strange to hear his voice again outside of his nightmares. His socks squish unpleasantly in the mud as he tries to keep his breathing steady. To keep himself from panicking. He's been kidnapped. Again. He's been fucking kidnapped again.

At this point he can rate his kidnapping experiences from bad to worst.

"You've always been a very spirited young man and I've found myself in a bit of a dilemma lately, lacking in company to test my new subjects and such and I thought... why not invite that nice young man I've been experimenting on?"

"Fuck you."

"Ah! There's that spirit. Good. Good. I was afraid the Quirimorbus softening might have been too affective by now. I've had my assistant checking up on you here and there and she seemed to think you were breaking in rather well."

"You god damn bastard," Katsuki hissed, leaping up onto the rock with every intentions of smashing the radio to bits.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, my young friend, there's still some things I need to tell you that are quite important." Katsuki pauses as he realizes that one, this guy could clearly see him and respond, two, he really had no idea where the fuck he was. *"Good. Good. Now, no softening tonight, rather, you're going to be exercising the Nomu."*

"What the fuck are you saying?" Katsuki mutters in horror.

"Exactly what it sounds like, my boy. Careful though, they aren't fully trained and they aren't particular keen on following orders, so if you don't

try your hardest to survive, you probably won't."

The ground rumbles. Katsuki whips around to see a long limbed black thing crawling out of the ground, its brain exposed and three large eyes all looking at him.

"I'll only release one at a time for play time, half an hour each, lets say? Again, I really appreciate you doing this for me. They've been so antsy all cooped up in my lab. I need to stock up on more volunteers, but one very hard to break hero in training should do just fine for now."

The radio cut out, static coming through as Katsuki stared at it in disbelief. His eyes moved back to the Nomu, noticing a large black collar around its neck, a small light at the center of the collar glowing red. These were the motherfuckers who had given All Might, Endeavor, and Hawks, the top heroes, a run for their money. And here Katsuki was, not even in his gear, his socks soaking in six inches of mud. No gear. No bracers. No gloves. No weapons.

The light on the collar turned green.

"I'll kill you," Katsuki muttered, bracing his arms.

The Nomu charged.



Fuck this shit. Fuck it. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Katsuki leaped upwards, using a small explosion to propel him just high enough to dodge. No wasted effort. Nothing flashy. No over excitement. The Nomu underneath him rammed into a rock wall, small pieces of debris hitting Katsuki as he landed on his own rock.

It had been hours.

Every muscle in his body had been overused. His eyesight had been going in and out like a poor quality film. His balance feeling more like a rusting tilting carnival ride. Sweat covered every inch of him despite the cold winds slamming him from all sides. His toes were frozen, bare to the world, having lost his socks long ago along with most of his pants and part of his school shirt. Katsuki didn't stop moving though.

He leaped off the rock, back flipping and sliding across the mud in an awkward landing. The Nomu- the seventh one to show up, roared at the sky. He knew they could talk, but it was usually useless babble

that he'd stopped paying attention too. At least while the light was green. When the lights on the collars turned red, they stopped moving. Retreating to some place Katsuki didn't give two shits about because he was usual trying to not kill over from lack of air.

Whenever a Nomu got a little too close to knocking him out or killing him, the Doctor would retract the monsters. Katsuki had been surveying the landscape and as far as he could see the area was completely abandoned for miles.

Katsuki dove as the Nomu charged again, breaking one of the rocks to get to him. A blast kept him out of the beasts grasp, but only barely. He tried putting his feet under him but they folded beneath him.

He rolled.

Large black claws reached for him. He grit his teeth, throwing his hands in front of him and blasting the hands away, using the momentum to jump back, he landed on all fours. Fingers digging into the mud, grasping onto a large rock, throwing it.

It clinked off of the Nomu's forehead in a comically useless fashion.

The... female? Tilted its head at him, a low rasping thing that might have been a laugh escaping its mouth. Katsuki's knees hit the mud. He couldn't... The creature lunged. Large hands grabbing him around the waist, around his shoulders.

The collar turned red.

Clapping could be heard as the Nomu in front of him froze, its grip only marginally relaxing. He heard the sound of static, another radio, there were dozens hidden in the area. All echoing the Doctors voice like some sadistic side show.

"Marvelous. Marvelous! Oh, I do enjoy watching you."

A shiver went down Katsuki's spine. He pried at the hands holding him, but they did not loosen. The Nomu blinked slowly at him, its breathing heavy, excited. Like a dog that was ready for a treat.

"Now, Katsuki," he hated the way his name sounded on the man's lips. Like he was savoring the sounds. "You are a very talented young man. I expected you to nearly die a dozen times today, but there were only five or six moments where I needed to intervene. You are adaptable, able to take in a situation and react to it instantaneously. You are resourceful, using the environment around you to your advantage, despite how sparse it is in this area. You are vicious, don't think I didn't notice how you used that rock to stab one of my Nomu's eyes out. You are an ideal specimen for cultivation."

"I'm going to cut your fucking dick off and beat you to death with it," Katsuki spat between heaving breaths, using a small explosion against the hands to little result. His muscles protested, torn apart as they were, his arms were practically limp against him.

"Have you put any more thought into joining the League?"

He sounded way too fucking amused. Katsuki snarled in the general direction of the closest radio sound.

"I'm going to rip your Nomu's testicles out and shove them down your throat and then I'm going to find the League and tie all their organs together so that I can hang the whole fucking group over All For One's prison cell as a Christmas present."

"How thoughtful," The Doctor sighed, though he didn't sound disappointed. "I had thought you would make a good little ally for Tomura, but I can not lie, I do enjoy watching over your growth personally. He's such a spoiled child. Who knows how he would have handled you and it would have been most disappointing if he'd killed you before you'd blossomed."

Katsuki screamed in frustration and rage as he yanked angrily at the hands.

"I've been thinking of keeping you all to myself, actually."

He froze. The nails digging into the flesh of the Nomu relaxing as every other inch of his body tensed. No. No. No. That wasn't what he... Katsuki swallowed thickly. Revulsion running down his spine.

"My assistant is often performing tasks for me outside of the lab so it does tend to get lonely here and I do need a bodyguard. Of course, if I fail to break you in and you prove to be too difficult a case, you would make for a fantastic Nomu piece. That Explosion Quirk of yours would work fantastically with at least three other specimen I have here. A nifty shield quirk, regeneration is always a winner, a lava creationist. I dare say you'd be one of the finer high quality Nomu and since you would be the central body, you might even keep some of your emotions and thoughts. Wouldn't that be delightful?"

Katsuki gagged, his stomach clenching tightly, trying to force acid up his throat.

"I'm getting ahead of myself though. We still have so much more work to do. Tomura is working quite hard to bring things together with his team. All For One's loyalist are gathering quietly under the radar, moving things along nicely, but these things take time. Patience. Dedication. Isn't that right, Katsuki?"

"You're a filthy fucking son of a bitch. I swear I'm going to fucking kill you."

"Promises, promises, my dear Katsuki. Now, I've bruised you up quite enough for the time being, I think. Do consider what I've said though. You will be joining us, either willingly as part of my team, or unwillingly as part of my... special high quality weapons. It was not just Tomura who showed an interest in you, even All For One himself seemed strangely attracted to the idea of having you on our side. And now... well, I've become rather fond of you myself. It's that charming personality, no doubt."

"Like hell," Katsuki slammed his fists down, putting every drop of

sweat and power into the blow. The Nomu screeched as it stumbled back. The vaguely female form twisting, hissing angrily as it came near before pausing again. The collar still red.

A chuckle filled the air, as Katsuki himself hissed in pain. His chest sizzling from small burns and his hands aching from overuse of his quirk. He moved backwards, bare feet tracking thick sludge like mud as he tried to get as far away from the radio and Nomu as possible.

“It does not matter where you go or how hard you fight, I will always be able to get my hands on you.”

He felt it.

So familiar in the way his limbs began to ache- in a different way. Not from torn muscles and over exertion but from a bone deep friction inside his body. Grinding together, shards of glass wedging themselves between his joints, a tenderness enveloping his flesh that left him vulnerable in a way that not even being trapped in the Nomu's hands could.

His knees gave out.

His face hit the mud and he had to turn over, onto his back to keep himself from choking. Dirt and grit smeared in his teeth and lining his throat. His limbs refused to move at his command, refused to carry him even an inch further, away from that thing and the Nomu. He wanted to scream, but even that ability had been stolen from him. Visible skin bruising under his sight.

“Bring him to me.”

Coward. Stopping him from fighting back. A thought formed in the back of his mind. An idea that maybe the Doctor was as weak in his body as he truly appeared. A middle aged, overweight man. If he could get the drop on him...

Claws wrapped around him, pulling him out of the mud, dangling him like a fucking rag doll. Pain shot through his body. A spine crunching agony that caused a scream to rip from his throat, though the sound

that actual emitted from him was lower, a half choked wheeze.

He doesn't really remember the scenery. Going in and out of consciousness as he was. He does remember the fucking stench of ash and rot, the substance wrapping around him like death. He does remember being dropped onto the floor in a dark place. A strange green glow surrounding the area.

He does remember a hand reaching towards him. Black fingertips. The Doctor's touch lingering in places he doesn't want to think about.

"We can't return you looking like that, now can we? Torn up and bruised all over. That won't do." A hand strokes his head, fingers tugging at his hair, lingering on the spot where he'd gotten a concussion. He hears a tut. Feels something cold trailing him from head to navel. "I could keep you, but I really want this to be your choice."

Was that a fucking joke?

When the pain lifts, he doesn't have a chance to react or fight. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a thing, a head detached from its body, its mouth is opening and... holy fuck. Rot and ash come pouring out in the form of the black liquid and he feels it, inside him, welling up, before it ever spiels out of his mouth, before it ever wraps around him.

It's so much worse knowing where it comes from.

Katsuki coughs and hacks and convulses on the floor of his room. He shrinks into himself there, his mouth opening and closing, clicking shut as he tries to suppress the screams trying to escape. The tar squelches between his fingers, along his spine, in his mouth. He's curled so tight in a ball that his knees are touching his forehead.

He's back.

As if nothing at all happened.

He can still see the small piece of paper on the table. There's absolute silence around him. Darkness outside of the window. His lights are still on. Time has passed but nothing has changed.

No one knows.

No one noticed.

He'd been taken right out of his room. Swept away by a quirk and returned just as easily. He'd... Katsuki curses as he feels hot tears sliding down his face. That fucker, that sadistic prick... he'd healed Katsuki but everything still hurt.

His heart hurt.

It felt like someone had ripped it out of his chest and it was beating in front of him, throbbing, the fucking veins still connected in his chest. He... a sob came out. Katsuki covered his mouth with his hand, but he felt it taking over his chest. An ugly thing escaped his throat, the sound something entirely unfamiliar to him.

Too loud.

He was being too loud. Shut up. Shut up. He can't be heard. He doesn't have an explanation for all the mud. He doesn't have a lie that can cover this. A keening sound bursts passed his hand. He can't stop trembling. He can't stop making fucking noise!

A knock at the door.

"Bakugou?"

Katsuki covered his mouth with both hands, trying to stifle the sound more, but it kept coming. And it was getting uglier. Louder. He tucked his head harshly into his knees as he felt his chest heaving.

“Bakugou! What’s wrong?” Kirishima’s voice came out louder. Panicked. Frightened. Ha. Kirishima didn’t know what it meant to be fucking frightened. He didn’t have a god damn clue. He didn’t know what it was like to be out of your mind with terror.

Katsuki did though.

He...

The sound like a dying animal escaped his throat. His head tapped the floor and he heard the door bang.

“I’m... I’m going to break your handle off if you don’t answer the door right now!” Kirishima called.

Moving his body was like trying to get a rusted, abandoned set of gears to turn. Jerking and spasming, but... He managed it. Katsuki stumbled to his feet, already hearing the sounds of Kirishima shuffling back as if to ram it with his shoulder. The fucking idiot. With shaking exhaustion, he fumbled the locks open, turning the handle. The moment the door was cracked, fingers forced it the rest of the way open.

And then Kirishima was standing there. Staring at Katsuki in wide eyed confusion.

“What...?” Katsuki was still holding his hand over his mouth, trying to keep the sounds in, trying to keep everything in. Clamping his hand so tight that there would probably be bruises there soon. “Hey, hey... what the hell happened? Why are you covered in... what...”

Then Kirishima’s arms were pulling him into a hug. Arms wrapping around his back and holding him tight. And god damn it, he leaned into it, he buried his face into his friend’s chest and the thing in his own chest came out louder. His legs wouldn’t hold him up any longer. He was being lowered to the ground and like cracked glass a wail came out of his throat. Pain came out of his throat. Hurt came out of

his throat. Loneliness and agony and heartache came tumbling out of his mouth as he clutched onto Kirishima's chest and his friend rocked him back and forth like he was some child. Like he was some weak ass, pathetic fucking...

He doesn't know how long the sobs wracked his frame. When they finally turned into a humiliating keening noise that eventually ebbed into small hiccups and then silence. All he knows is that Kirishima didn't leave him the whole time. Kirishima's grip never loosened, not once from him and that Katsuki's didn't either. He was still clutching at his friend, his hands digging in too deeply, holding on too tightly.

Until exhaustion loosened his grip.

He was so tired. All the pride in the world could hardly stop him from falling asleep right here. He was so warm, actually, in one of the most awkward positions possible, with his legs spread out across the floor and his back arched, his neck leaning against his friends abs and face buried in his chest, but the idea of letting go was terrifying.

The reality of staying awake for much longer unlikely.

"Bakugou?"

He hummed tiredly, feeling his eyes already starting to close.

"What happened?"

Katsuki blinked slowly, trying to keep himself awake.

"I... 'splain later, okay? Can you tell 'zawa I'm sick. Don't feel so good."

"Yeah, of course, I will."

The room goes dark. He doesn't know anything after that.

Kirishima is pretty sure he's experiencing a heart attack.

Because Katsuki freaking Bakugou is passed out against him after sobbing his eyes out for... Kirishima checks his phone, shocked to see it's already four in the morning. He'd come banging on Bakugou's door at two.

Kirishima is careful to cradle his friend against him as he looks around for a solution, because Katsuki looks like he'd visited a county fair and had a mud wrestling match. Shirt in shreds and absolutely filthy and... where were his shoes?!

What the hell had happened?

And yeah... Katsuki would probably be kind of mad if Kirishima put him on his bed in such a filthy state, but putting him on the floor seems really not good.

He's also sure that this whole situation probably deserves a very angry lecture too because, and he really wishes he could say otherwise, but it seems really obvious Bakugou lost his freaking mind and trained. Probably left through the sliding glass doors. Raged against some forest area or training area in his school uniform before stumbling back to his room.

Training when he's supposed to be recovering.

Going out in the blistering cold despite being told to take precautions.

Right after they'd finally cornered him into eating a full meal.

Frustration bubbles up in his chest and he squeezes Bakugou's shoulders, hugging his unconscious friend to him. Feeling a very

unmanly desire to shake him. Why? Why was he doing this to himself?

And why had he been...?

He lays Bakugou down to take a better look at him, noting the torn pants and useless shirt. He uses a wet rag from the bathroom and wipes him off as best he can without being too invasive and carefully removes the rest of Bakugou's shirt to toss in the trash.

There's no scratches, no bruising.

It makes him take in a huge sigh of relief even as confusion takes the place of his stress.

In the end he decides to take one of his own sheets and lay it on top of the bed. Kirishima could care less if he had to do a little extra laundry. He puts his arms under Bakugou's legs and back and lifts him up onto the bed. His friend doesn't so much as twitch.

Pulse steady.

No injuries.

No fever.

Breathing is fine.

Nothing is wrong, but Kirishima feels like he should alert Recovery Girl. The idea is stupid. Bakugou cried. That was it. He looked like he blew up a training grounds somewhere and he was obviously exhausted, but crying wasn't a reason to wake the old woman up. Especially when there was nothing physically wrong. He puts his head in his hands, sitting down on the bed next to his friend's sleeping form.

Why does everything involving Bakugou always have to be so complicated? Maybe Bakugou never lied, but getting the truth from him was excruciatingly painful. So tight lipped about everything and emotionally constipated.

Bakugou understood emotions, he just didn't know how to relate his own to other people. It had taken Kirishima the better part of the year to get a lot of the things Bakugou did and said. Like how when he left his door open it was an invitation to come in. Like how his angry blank stare when the others were talking usually meant Bakugou wanted to join in, he just wasn't sure how to do that.

Hands in his pockets was a show of restraint, it was Bakugou's way of forcing himself to approach a situation without accidentally coming off as aggressive (he still failed more than not). If he was standing in the background that was as close to insecure as Bakugou got, silently waiting for some form of inclusion or invitation, but he wouldn't come if no one wanted him there. At least, that's what Kirishima had finally picked up on after watching him slouch away one too many times after a few minutes of standing in the background- waiting. Bakugou never suggested hang out times and he never lightly accepted them.

It was as if you had to prove that you really wanted to hang out with him before he would agree. Like the idea that anyone wanting to be his friend was such a bizarre concept that he treated each moment as if it were a trick or some kind of pity case. If you pushed and prodded then it meant that you were serious about it. That had taken forever for Kirishima to understand and only because he had a naturally pushy personality.

To see the hard expression slowly morph into a small spark, which Kirishima now recognized as Bakugou believing Kirishima's offer, that then turned into a grudging agreement which he now knew was a sort of weary, reluctant stance. Closed off only because he expected to be rejected.

Bakugou had full confidence when it came to his physical abilities, grades, and work ethic. No one could or would tell the guy that he

wasn't the best, but when it came to social interaction? Bakugou would rather choose to take on ten villains at the same time than try to sit at a table with anyone at lunch.

He'd probably have better success with the villains too.

He once saw Bakugou try to give Aoyama an impressed grin when the guy finally pulled off a back flip, but it came off so savage that poor Aoyama looked as if he'd pissed himself. Bakugou had tensed up after that and hadn't relaxed for hours.

Kirishima felt frustrated FOR Bakugou.

He slept for an couple hours like that, leaning against the bed with one of Bakugou's blankets, listening to the steady rise and fall of his breathing. He killed the alarm when it went off, dragging himself off to the showers before getting dressed for the day. He brought Bakugou up a protein bar, a water bottle and a few fruits, leaving them beside the bed before gingerly waking his friend up.

Blood shot eyes peered at him through slits, dark bags beneath all that red a horrible picture to witness. Kirishima grimaced, feeling really shitty for waking him, but wanting to make sure that his friend would wake up at all. To make sure he hadn't missed anything this morning.

"Hey buddy, I'm heading to class, try to drink some water, okay? I've got some by the bed. I'm going to come back and check on you at lunch, okay?"

Bakugou turned over, nodding slowly and curling tightly into a ball. Kirishima's worry increased at the lack of response.

"Do you need anything?" He pushed. "Do you want me to stay with you? I can. I can totally stay with you. We can just... or well, I can do some studying while you sleep and..."

"Just... go," Bakugou rasped, sounding a little exasperated.

“Okay,” Kirishima easily agreed. He sat down on the bed anyways though, grabbing the bottle of water and shaking it. “How bout you sit up real quick though and drink this so that I know you aren’t going to die of dehydration while I’m at class.”

There was a muffled groan, Bakugou put his arms under him and tried to push himself up, but he quickly slumped back down with a hiss. Kirishima grabbed him from around the shoulders, feeling his school jacket getting dirt on it from the grime that coated him. He could care less, feeling worry at just how much help Bakugou needed to simply sit up.

He held the water bottle up to Bakugou’s lips and his friend took it in shaking hands, drinking greedily. Kirishima actually had to force him to slow down. In the end, he went to the bathroom four times, refilling the water bottle before Bakugou finally stopped drinking and slumped back down onto the bed.

“What the hell did you do last night, Bakugou?” Kirishima demanded, more than a little angry. “How could you do this to yourself after seeing Recovery Girl and talking to Aizawa? I know you know better than to train when you’ve been told not to.”

Or, at least, he thought Bakugou knew better.

“Passing out from not eating is serious, its not manly to neglect taking care of yourself!”

And what about how his classmates had reacted?

They were all worried sick about him. Not eating and passing out. Not sleeping. Not taking care of himself at all. Being so quiet. It was scaring the shit out of them. Couldn’t he see that? Didn’t he know?

Of course he didn’t.

Because he was an idiot.

He turned to his friend only to feel a well of frustration consume him. Bakugou was asleep again. In an impossibly awkward angle. He sighed, pulling his friend down and noting with a grimace the mud marks on the wall that would probably aggravate Bakugou to no end when he woke up.

He was bringing the biggest lunch ever when he got back and he was going to watch him eat every last bite before he threw him in the shower. He was going to be the biggest pain in the ass mother hen Bakugou had ever had the displeasure of knowing and there wasn't a single person that was going to stand in his way.

For now though.

He pulled the covers over his friend, tucking him in and heading out to class.

Even if Bakugou would get upset about it, he couldn't not tell Aizawa about this. This has gone too far and he was not going to let his best friend get away with sneaking out and hurting himself with over training. Whatever was going on in that head of his, Kirishima was going to figure it out.

Chapter End Notes

Things are going to be coming to a head in the next few chapters. And I just figured out that if I hit the rich text first, it allows me to create separation lines, bold, and italics. I feel like an idiot.

Anyways, my hypothesis with the Doctor's Nomu transporting with the tar stuff is that he can't just transport anyone. He can only transport people who he has some sort of DNA of. The League and Bakugou since they'd kidnapped him and kept him for three days. So the other Hero kids are perfectly safe, but Bakugou is not. What I don't understand is why All for One insisted on using the gate transportation during that battle at Kamino instead of just doing the tar again.

All for One clearly intended to be captured, that's obvious, but

why not get the others and Bakugou somewhere else if he had the ability to do that? Mysteries, mysteries. I have a theory, but it doesn't relate to this fic so I'll keep my piece for now on it.

Anywho:

Chapter 9 Summary: In which Aizawa is very suspicious and the Bakusquad move in.

Feedback via reviews is always a good way to tell me what you like so that I can put more of that into the story.

Chapter 10: Unravel

Chapter Summary

In which Aizawa has suspicions and the Bakusquad helps... in their own way

Chapter 10: Unraveling

“Where’s Kacchan hiding?”

Kirishima winced as Kaminari made a show of looking around the room dramatically, as if Bakugou was hiding under one of the tables or something. He had an easy grin on his face, but it dropped off as soon as he caught sight of Kirishima’s face.

“What? What happened?”

“Bakugou’s sick,” Kirishima muttered. The lie tasted gross in his mouth and he felt irritated with himself for going along with Bakugou’s bullshit. Sero and Ashido were both giving him a looks like he didn’t believe him.

Kaminari slumped into his desk, looking around more cautiously this time.

“What’s really going on?” the blonde demanded, voice quiet.

“I know, right?” Ashido muttered. “We were there yesterday too, you know.”

“He snuck out last night to train,” Kirishima relented. “He was a mess when he got back.”

“He’s going to kill himself,” Sero muttered, voice dark. “Seriously, if he keeps this shit up he’s really going to...”

“I know!” Kirishima hissed. “I know. I just don’t know what to do about it!”

“That doesn’t sound like him,” Kaminari interrupted. “The guy’s reckless, but he’s not stupid.”

“Kami’s right,” Ashido muttered. “He must be lying. It has to be something else.”

“Well,” Kirishima said reluctantly, “he didn’t say he’d been training, but what else could it have been? He was covered from head to toe in dirt and his clothes were all torn up.”

Now that the others had said something though, it did set alarms off in his head.

“He wasn’t wearing gym clothes?” Sero questioned.

“No, but I just assumed he worked himself up and just sort of, you know...?” Kirishima said slowly, twisting his shirt in his hands in agitation. That sounded pretty dumb now that he’d said it out loud. “What’s the alternative though?”

“Well, you said his clothes were all torn up...” Sero said slowly. “What if he was attacked?”

“No,” Kirishima denied. “I’m right next door. I’d know if something like that happened. Besides, we’d all hear it if there was a huge fight.”

Ashido was shaking her head though.

“It’s been proven that Villains can get to us, get to Bakugou, and there’s an endless amount of quirks out there. Types we’ve never seen before. Whose to say something didn’t happen?”

“There’s surveillance all over the place though!”

The explosive words caught the attention of their classmates.

“Sorry.”

He turned back to his friends, his hands moving from his shirt to his knees, squeezing them as he tried to wrap his head around the thought. The picture of Bakugou covered in grime, sobbing against his chest, shaking from head to toe and feeling frozen. Ice cold to the touch.

It had terrified him, but this was the first time that he thought that maybe, just maybe, Bakugou had been suffering from terror too. That thought alone has a panicky sort of feeling running down his spine.

Did he mess up?

Did he misinterpret the situation?

Did he leave Bakugou alone after he’d been attacked?

“Bakugou would tell me though,” Kirishima said slowly, grasping at the last logical bit he had. Because Kaminari was right, Bakugou was a bit reckless, definitely hot tempered, but he was smart. He wouldn’t keep something like that to himself, especially if there was the possibility that others could get hurt.

“What if he was given a reason not to,” Sero said slowly. “What if he couldn’t tell you?” That thought leaves the whole group looking somber. “What if something a lot worse than what we think is going on?”

“That’s... a bit much, isn’t it?” Kaminari said quietly. “So he was covered in mud and his clothes were torn a little? Now we’re talking

conspiracy theories and attacks that no one knows about. That's kind of ridiculous, isn't it?"

They'd all been in that classroom doing extra coursework though, hadn't they? They'd all stood by helplessly as Villains came and attacked high schoolers at a summer camp, Heroes in training or not, just to get their hands on Bakugou.

Not just common criminals either. Top of the list, A-class criminals set on destroying the credit of Heroes. People who worked for All For One, the man who'd forced All Might into retirement.

These were the people who had kidnapped Bakugou before. Was it truly such a stretch of the imagination to think that they could get passed UA security? No. Was it beyond thinkable to imagine them attacking him in the middle of the night? No, unfortunately it was not. Could this really have happened while the rest of them were sleeping soundly right next door?

Kirishima felt sick as he realized the answer.

Yes.

It was entirely too possible.

The Doctor fucked up.

Katsuki stared down at his hands and chuckled. He stared down at his mud covered hands, the grime layering him from his toes to the dirt beneath his fingernails and he grins. The sadistic fucker messed up big time.

He rinses his water glass, then uses the rim to scrape off as much of the dried dirt as he can. Every chunk goes into the cup. Every extra bit. There's no more of the black tar, but there is a dark smudge on

the small card. He puts the glass and the card in a box and can't help the giddy grin that cracks across his face.

Everything hurts.

He's been put through a grinder and the world still tilts in an odd fashion when he moves about his room, but he forces his body to get up anyways because there's a spark of savage, brittle hope that wasn't there before and an urgency that doesn't exist anywhere but in his head.

The room is covered in dirt. Smears on the wall, on the carpet, on the bed. He doesn't pay attention to any of it. Why would he fucking care? It's so beyond giving two fucks about it. It doesn't even hit his radar.

He showered first because he might have a few screws loose at this point, but not quite that many. The hot water did little to ease his muscles, less for the tension, but he could care less. He dried off. Dressed. Walked out the door with his box held tensely in his arms. Its too small to need both his arms, but he can't help it. Its like a life line, keeping him grounded. He's not wearing his uniform even though classes are still going on and if he looks even marginally like how he feels then there's a high possibility someone will claim a corpse is walking around campus, but there's an odd pep to his step anyways as he heads towards the Department of Support.

His hair is wet and he has no coat on when he goes out into the cold. There's no snow today, but plenty of ice and his hair begins to freeze the moment he's outside, not dry enough yet. He hasn't recovered and the cold, as bad as it always is for him, is worse today. But hope keeps him warm and he moves forward without delay. He's too excited to be bothered by the fact that he can't feel his toes.

He doesn't knock.

He walked right into a silent room. No tinkering. No building. No signs at all of the pink haired inventor chick he remembers from the Sport's Festival and Deku's mumbled comments. His hands tighten on

the box and there's an itch to go search, but he suppresses it. Instead, he sits on one of the benches and waits.

It's hard to breathe. Like he was on the cusps of a panic attack even though there was nothing going on. The same as when they decided to chain him up for the Award Ceremony at the Sports Festival. The same feeling when he woke up on the table in the Doctor's sadistic little space. On the edge of keeping it together and abso-fucking-lutely not.

It was always easier when he had an opponent to focus on. A person who he could steady himself in front of. When he was alone though, on his own with his own thoughts, everything seemed to turn against him.

He shivered.

Aizawa went to his office for lunch. Sliding into his chair with nimble fingers flowing across the keyboard like second nature. The security system had not pulled up any students sneaking out after dark, as he'd had it set up to do after the incident with Midoriya and Bakugou, but he pulled up the live feed anyways and had it run a check for any movement at all outside of the Dorms. Nothing.

Aizawa dragged his fingers over his eyes as he watched the cameras fast forwarded through the evening, the system checking and rechecking. There was no movement though, no sign of Bakugou sneaking out. No sign of him coming back in. He widened the search: training fields, forested areas, gym areas. Nothing outside of a third year couple on the roof making out. He closed the screens, feeling a headache coming on.

"He looked worse than after the Sports Festival," Kirishima told him. "Worse than when he fought the mountain creatures all afternoon at the training camp."

Aizawa pushed away from his desk.

He could not have done that sort of damage to himself in the room. Besides...

“He was covered from head to toe in dirt. It looks like he was in a war zone, Sensei.”

Something happened involving a quirk. Inside the Dorms. Damn it. After he'd promised safety. After he'd promised security and protection.

It was clear to him that Kirishima thought the war zone was Bakugou himself. His student believed this was some sort of personal problem Bakugou was going through, but Aizawa was now sure, more than ever, that it was far more than that. The panic attack all those weeks ago had been his first clue. He and Midnight had sat down in the staff room discussing it.

“This might be the worst, but its certainly not the first time we've witnessed this type of behavior from him,” Midnight had noted.

Aizawa nodded.

“He reacts badly to anyone who sneaks up on him from behind. He's become more anxious, stressed, and its clear he isn't sleeping well.”

“You think its all due to Kamino?” Midnight had demanded.

“Would you be surprised? He hasn't talked to anyone about it outside of the police that first night. Toshinori says Bakugou blames himself for All Might's retirement. His cooperation with his classmates was getting better at the training camp and took a nose dive at the Licensing Exam that took place right after his kidnapping. He's been up and down since then. Sometimes he's perfectly fine and other times he shows extreme resistance to working with others, but his

exhaustion has been a problem since summer. He hides it. Well. If I wasn't specifically looking for the signs then I wouldn't notice it at all. He's still in the top three."

"But?"

"But he's been getting injured more in training. He's been struggling despite the fact that I know he works on his endurance more than anyone else in class."

"Perhaps he's overworking himself?"

"On the amount of sleep he gets, yes, but I've personally gone over his schedule just as I do with all of my students. He pushes himself, but not to the point of endangerment. I wouldn't allow it."

"Do you believe something else is going on here?" Midnight had asked. Her words had been prodding though and Aizawa had known then that she had her own suspicions.

"I do. Care to share your thoughts?" He'd said carefully.

Midnight had eyed her still healing fingers, opening them and closing them in thought, chewing on her lip. Reluctant, as she always was, to give an observation without something more concrete.

"Whatever he wrote on that paper... he was terrified of me seeing. Out of his mind with fear," she finally relented. "We were strategizing taking down hypothetical enemies, but whoever or whatever he was working on? It definitely wasn't hypothetical for him."

Aizawa wished he could figure out what the hell was going on in his students head. He'd known that Bakugou was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress, that much was obvious, but potentially going after the League hadn't been a worry until now. And this?

Kurogiri had been imprisoned. The Warp Gate Quirk user's teleportation on lock down. He hadn't informed his students of that development because he didn't want to bring up anything involving the League of Villains in any way. Better to keep their focus on their studies. They were too young yet to have to deal with Villains more than absolutely necessary. All For One was imprisoned so his own teleportation quirk with the tar had been removed from the equation as well which meant that something else was going on here.

Aizawa pushed away from his desk.

In the end the only way to know for sure was to get Bakugou to talk. Which was... problematic. He felt his shoulders sag of their own volition. He'd been a teacher for a number of years now and had a number of difficult cases when it came to stubborn teenagers, but Bakugou was... a very special case.

Strangely respectful of adults, for all the cursing he threw around. Completely disregarding his peers worth at times, but also watchful, observant. Always keep a close eye on things, but from a distance. Always emotionally guarded against even those Aizawa could see he considered his friends.

These kids... he often felt like he needed a degree in psychology just to teach. What were Midnight's selling points again? Stable income. More sleep. Less injuries. Less Stress. He definitely needed to sue her for falsified information.

Higari Maijima was not expected a student in the lab. He'd even forced Hatsume to take an hour lunch to get her away from all the smoke for a bit. Kids poor lungs were probably starving for oxygen. He should move her to an outside lab if she was going to continue blowing shit up. Unintentional or not.

Speaking of poor students though...

Bakugou looked like a drowned cat being kept in a room of rabid

dogs.

Shivering and shadow eyed, clutching at his box like it was keeping him in one piece. He could see immediately what Aizawa had been so worried about. The kid looked as if he hadn't gotten a good night's sleep in months. The normally well put together badass of class 1A looked like he'd rolled out of bed and then fell off a cliff before getting here.

"Hey, kid, didn't expect you to be here quite so early," Higari said casually. Bakugou jerked a little bit in surprise, he must have been really far off in his own head if he hadn't heard his metal boots against the floor. "I'm still finishing the coat, so you'll have to wait a bit."

"Coat?" Bakuogu echoed.

"Aizawa send you here without telling you what for?"

Typical.

"He prioritized a regular student coat with modifications for you. Insulated heating. A fitted hood. Gloves. The whole shebang. Said you've been getting sick a lot lately, that your quirk makes you vulnerable to the cold and he wanted you protected asap."

The kid bit down hard on his bottom lip, staring at the floor. Higari chuckled to himself, sauntering over to his table and beginning to tinker with the last of the wiring for the inside coating. He had a student whose craft was design coming in soon to do the sewing and cloth work. His fingers were too big to deal with that shit.

He glanced up to see that the student still hadn't moved. He remembered Aizawa mentioning something about the kid not eating enough to keep up with the damage being done by the frequent sickness. Higari shuffled into his office, kicking open his not so secret, secret mini-fridge and grabbed a pasta bowl.

“Normally I don’t allow eating in my lab. Discourages idiots like Hatsume from eating chemicals out of absentmindedness.”

He waved the bowl in front of Bakugou, the kids eyes following it wearily.

“But I also frown upon students looking like their on death door. Eat this.”

Reluctantly the kid put down his box and took the bowl. Higari hummed as he returned to his office, digging around a bit. He had... ah. There it was. Right were he’d intentionally put it rather than where he had not intended to put it. That was always a nice surprise.

Not to say he wasn’t organized, he just... wasn’t organized.

“We’ve been working with Asui for a winter uniform for her so that she can function even in zero degree weather without accidentally going into hibernation. I have a few extra pieces here and there that should work for you while your waiting on your own personal items to be finished.”

Without asking, he slipped a scarf around the blonde, the thick, heating reacting to chilled skin, just as he intended, the colors shifting from grey to a light orange as the heating pads worked their way through. Much to his satisfaction, the shivering stopped. Bakugou unconsciously brought the scarf closer, his hands fisting in the cloth, rubbing up and down to warm himself more thoroughly with the small article of clothing.

“Thanks,” Bakugou muttered.

The gruff gratitude was much like his own kids in support. The creative inventors weren’t much for idle chit chat. He often saw them struggling to form relationships with the much more boisterous, chatterbox personalities that made up the hero department. It made him feel a bit bad for the kid, knowing from experience that Bakugou had more of a nature that aligned with his own students than in the

hero department. Must be rough, having people expect you to be cheerful and bright all the time and being continually disappointed when that simply wasn't the case.

It had been a long while since he was in that position. Despite his youthful appearance and short stature, he was the oldest staff member at the academy. It was getting harder and harder to relate to issues he hadn't personally experienced in twenty some odd years.

He ruffled the kids hair, watching in satisfaction as a scowl formed.

There, that was more like it.

"If you're going to sit there like a pathetic lump of coal then at least sit at the end of my table so I can tell you how your coat is built. That way if it malfunctions you might have a chance in hell of fixing it yourself instead of bothering me for repairs."

The kid didn't hesitate. He pulled a chair up, crossing his legs as he continued to eat the pasta, watching him work quietly. Knew it. This kid would fit right in with his own class. Higari nodded in approval as he worked, connecting wires and lining the last of the bottom part with padding, explaining as he went each of the components purposes. The heat resistant cloth lining the inside to stop any fires from starting inside the coat, the durability material he chose to offset Bakugou's explosions because if he was going to go through the trouble of making a specialized student coat then he was going to do it right.

He watched the kid's eyes light up in approval and respect as he worked.

'Rough around the edges and in the center,' was the phrase Yamada had used, but he didn't think so. The more time he spent around this kid the more he thought he was just... not the hero type. Well, the kid was clearly hero material, he just wasn't standard. He didn't come in the same packaging that most of his classmates and Pro-Heroes did.

"So, do you want to tell me what the box is about?" Higari asked after a while.

Bakugou glanced at the box he'd brought in, before biting his lip again, chewing on it as he seemed to struggle with what to say. Higari shrugged, humming in his throat as he looked back down at his work, carefully moving a set of warming pads over an inch and cinching them in place with pins for his design student.

"It's a weird request," Bakugou admitted. He slipped off of his stool and meandered over to the box, pulling out a glass of... dirt? "I need to know what area in Japan this dirt is common in? I was wondering if you guys had some sort of..."

"That's more police support than hero support. Investigation department rather than equipment," Higari noted.

The boy scowled, looking down at the glass in clear frustration.

"I didn't say I don't have anything like that..." Higari added, watching him. "I just said that its not really what we do."

Such stark hope... no, desperation. This was important. Suspicion had settled into his thoughts as he worked, but now it was cemented. Bakugou needed to know this information. The way his eyes were so focused on him, waiting, watching, tensed up in preparation to move. It reminded him of heroes waiting to move in on an enemy.

"Give me the glass," Higari demanded, leaving the table. Bakugou did so, moving about him in tense anticipation. "And do me a favor, grab one of the books off my shelf and start reading it. If you keep pacing near me like that, I'm going to kick you out and I've got a feeling you don't want that."

Bakugou frowned, but complied.

Higari noted he picked up 'Basic Applications of Bracers for Elemental quirks.' Which meant that the boy wasn't just humoring him, but taking advantage of the command. Good. Another mark in his favor.

He knows Bakugou hasn't come in to the Support Department before, but he'd also seen the designs the kid had put in for his original costume. Katsuki Bakugou put a hell of a lot more thought into his gear than most of the other first years. Boots for gripping the ground against backlash. Bracers and gloves designed against heat and for rough hand to hand combat. Weapons that best utilized his quirks ability. Back bracers and head pieces meant to protect his ears from the sound waves caused by the explosions of his quirk. Bakugou hadn't needed to change his costume before winter because he'd already anticipated all that he'd require.

His analysis equipment in the office had been set up because Nezu requested it. The High Specs Intelligence Quirk meant that the Principle was all for being ready for unanticipated problems in the future and unconventional needs. Which was why Higari even had this job. It had been Nezu who had put into play the idea of creating a Department training potential tech majors. There was no other school in Japan that offered different Departments in their Hero schools other than UA.

There were other schools that taught how to create Hero gear, but no other schools that allowed Hero Support and Hero Trainees to work side by side. No other school that allowed for General Studies students to prove their worth and move up to Hero Course work.

There was a reason why UA was the best though he knew many people might note different reasons than Higari's own beliefs. Many believed it was the intense training or the large scale training grounds that allowed for versatility. Some thought it was that every staff member was a Pro-Hero with at least ten years of experience before they were even considered to become a teacher. Others chalked it up to the amount of money poured into the school, able to create gear and materials for the most elite type of schooling and training.

It was the lessons themselves.

UA could be the poorest, smallest, most pathetic looking academy out there and it would still be the best because the lessons taught here

valued certain ideals. The idea that the students themselves were plus ultra. That cultivating their will, their skills, their problem solving abilities, and their heart was the most important thing.

Higari heard his machine beep. He pulled up the screen, his brow scrunching up as he looked at the results. Why the hell did Bakugou have dirt in a cup from nearly a hundred miles away? If not more. The closest place was eighty-seven miles from here, the farthest one was two hundred something. He printed two sets of the papers off, tucking one of the papers away at his desk, and taking the other out to his waiting student.

Bakugou stood up instantly, looking at him with wide eyes.

“What does it say?”

Higari waved the paper in front of him with a cocked brow.

“There’s seventeen locations on the other side of Japan where the dirt sample you gave me could have come from.”

He left the silent question in the air, but Bakugou ignored it as he took the papers, staring at them in disbelief, his hands shaking.

“Is there something that you want to tell me?” Higari pushed, watching closely.

Red eyes looked up at him, too wide, vulnerable. Those were the eyes of a cornered animal before the hunter ripped its throat out.

“No. No, its just... something I needed to know.”

“Yeah?” Higari said carefully.

“Nothing important.”

“Uh huh.”

“Thanks, for this,” Bakugou said. He was so tense, his fingers were crushing the papers. The dark circles under his eyes contrasted pitifully against pale skin, making him look pretty sickly, hair in disarray and an almost manic way to his movements. Like Hitsume when a deadline was coming up and her inventions were still malfunctioning.

“Anytime kid. Let me know if you need anything else, alright? Come pick up your coat tomorrow. I don’t need it taking up more room in this place than necessary.”

“Yeah, of course, yeah,” Bakugou mumbled, entirely distracted by the papers.

Higari watched the kid go, rubbing the back of his neck as a bit of stress attacked him in the form of a headache. Ah. This was probably something he needed to take care of sooner rather than later. Darn. He’d really wanted to finish a few other items today other than the jacket. He left a note for Priska on the jacket, telling her it was all good to go before grabbing the papers and heading out himself.

Bakugou wasn’t in his freaking room. Kirishima stared in utter disbelief at the muddled floor and bed and wall and... everything, but no Bakugou. He set the lunch down and glared at the place as if his friend would magically appear.

He should not be up and moving.

“What’s wrong?” Sero asked from outside, coming to peer into the room. “Jeez, you weren’t exaggerating. Its not like Bakugou to leave a mess either. He’s so anal about keeping everything super tidy.”

Yeah. That was only one of the things really bothering him about all of this and not really high on the priority list. What if they're wild theories were right? What if it had been Villains and Bakugou was hurt?

"We need to find him."

Sero looked only a little concerned.

"Listen, I know he's had a rough time of it, but he's probably just down stairs grabbing something to drink or something to eat or..." Sero motioned to the room. "Something to clean up this mess he's left behind. Besides, we should check everywhere before we start to panic, yeah?"

He hated that Sero had a point.

"I do have an idea though, before we go looking for our Blasty McSplodey, Lord of Explodo Kills. Something that will stop him from locking us out," Sero added, pulling a screw driver out of his pocket. "And it will only take a few minutes."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Katsuki felt deep satisfaction as he looked through the papers. Seventeen places, most in the middle of nowhere, but he'd been looking up some of them on his phone and a lot of them looked nothing like where he'd been dragged yesterday. There were ten areas that didn't supply any sort of Ariel overview, which was both suspicious and probably telling.

The Doctor's playground had been miles and miles of land in all directions, which had helped to further knock out another two locations for him. Eight possible hell holes for the Doctor to hide in.

This was a lot fucking better than where he'd been even a day ago.

He had a means of moving forward.

A way to fight.

His muscles and back and... well, fucking everything hurt like hell, but this was... invigorating. He had a means to fight! He had a way to investigate! He was a helpless little shit with no direction anymore. He had goals and hope and a way to strategize and hope!

He was alive.

For the first time in a long while he was alive and could feel it. He'd been a corpse before. Walking around, expecting the worst day in and day out. A stressed out ball of anxiety just waiting for the sickle to drop.

He could get permission to visit his parents for the weekend. Head out to the areas one by one, gather information. It's not like they'd notice he was gone. He'd just tell them not to bother them and set something up... like a voice recording to respond. His mom was predictable and his dad never came to his door.

Oh. And Holidays were coming up quickly. No one would think twice of the out of character behavior, going home for the holidays was something everyone would be doing. That would give more than just the weekend.

He could do this.

Once he had the location, that was a whole 'nother matter. No doubt it would be lined with top notch security systems. Probably a Nomu

patrolling the area for any trespassers. Bakugou wasn't stupid, he had no skill in espionage, but...

BUT.

He and Todoroki qualified for Internships now. He had a list of possible candidates in his desk at this very moment. What if he looked for heroes who specialized in that? Probably an Underground Hero like Aizawa. He might even be able see if there were any Underground Heroes working in the area of the Doctor.

He was giddy with excitement. Fucking brimming with the shit.

Dead on his feet tired, but thrumming like an overcharged electrical cord. He hugged the scarf to him as he stepped off the elevator. Feeling the warmth of the heated material easing some of the left over tension.

He still had to clean everything in the room, but even that couldn't deter him from the thought of sleep. Curling up in his bed and passing out for a few hours. He could do the research afterwards. Have everything prepared by tonight.

He turned the corner and stopped short.

At first, it didn't click what he was seeing, but when it did, his blood boiled.

"Where the fuck is my door?"

Chapter 11: The Unexpected

Chapter Summary

In which Dadzawa plays Sherlock and plans are made

Chapter 11: The Unexpected

An angry voice told him that his student had arrived.

“Where the fuck is my door?”

“That’s a pretty good question,” Shota said, stepping into the light of the hall, “but I can promise you that my questions are much more important.”

He watched his student pause, noting that Kirishima had not been exaggerating, Bakugou looked like shit. Ragged and worn down and looking like he could really use a ten-year nap. The angry lines stretching from shoulders to arms tensed further rather than relaxing. Movements like a startled cat, Bakugou watched him in resigned weariness.

Shota held his hands up carefully, gesturing to the room. Bakugou walked in, eyes lingering on the stripped bed and the freshly cleaned walls, fresh sheets sitting, ready to be stretched over the corners. He set his odd box down, dropping papers inside of it.

“Thought after your rough night,” Shota said carefully, watching his student avoid his eyes, “that you could use the fresh linen and a checkup.”

“I’m just not feeling good,” Bakugou muttered.

“So you decided to take a stroll outside in the cold? To make yourself feel better?” Shota demanded, voice sharp as he pointed to the boy’s snow-covered shoes. “Without even wearing a jacket? Bakugou, I know you know better. You’re one of the few students I thought had common sense! I guess I was wrong.”

His student flinched. Shota reigned in his anger at the uncharacteristic reaction. He expected anger, defiance, but this worn down version of his student had him rethinking his approach. Using more caution and

a softer tone.

“Did you really think Kirishima wouldn’t tell me?” Shota asked, rhetorical, of course, they both knew that the Kirishima didn’t have a deceptive bone in his body and lying was as against his nature as ignoring a cry for help.

Bakugou sighed, leaning back onto his bed, though it looked more like he folded onto it, using it to support himself.

“According to Kirishima, you went out and trained, but we both know that’s not what happened,” Shota got straight to the point. Bakugou glanced at him, he was tense, rigid, not moving an inch, but his eyes were strangely expectant.

His student sat up, his hands carefully tucked into his pockets, staring straight ahead.

Not a word.

‘So that’s how he’s going to play it?’

“You were attacked in some way,” Shota said carefully.

Bakugou gave nothing away though. Frustration bubbled up in his chest. He needed Bakugou’s cooperation in this. He couldn’t do anything if he didn’t know what was going on. He needed this boy to speak!

“Should I paint the picture myself?” Shota said, a bit of anger sliding through. “Security was breached. The use of a quirk within a dorm room. An isolated attack against one particular student. Is this sounding familiar?”

Bakugou didn’t move. His eyes purposefully looking forward, avoiding him.

“I can’t help you if you don’t talk,” Shota said sternly. “This is all just... assumptions. There’s nothing in our systems to suggest a break in. Only the impossibility that mud magically appeared in your room despite clear indications that you never left. I know a quirk was involved. I know you struggled. I can increase security. I can keep a closer eye on things. I can bring in a Hero Detail to watch the grounds.”

Bakugou still ignored him. Shota breathed through his nose, searching

the room for some sort of hint even though he'd already scoured it.

"I have done those things," Shota admitted to him. "If someone is threatening you, if for some reason you think that I can't protect you..." The words pained him. He's failed his student time and time again. Why would Bakugou trust him? "I give my word, Bakugou, I will do everything in my power to stop whatever is going on, but I need to know. I need you to tell me."

Bakugou clenched his jaw.

He looked about ready to burst, but he still wouldn't say a word. Wouldn't look at him. A tiny spark of suspicion uncurled in the back of Shota's mind.

"If I don't know what the situation is, then I can only sit and wait for something to happen. I can only react instead of doing something to stop whatever is going on. You understand that, right?"

Bakugou's red eyes refused to meet his own.

"I won't stop. I know something is going on and I will figure it out. The only real question is if you're going to help me."

The tension in the room was palpable.

"Are you done?" Bakugou muttered, voice coming out in a hiss. "Conspiracy theories aside, I really don't feel good."

Shota eyed his student carefully, watching the way his arms shook and the rigid way he held himself. Almost as if he were restraining his movements.

"Yeah, we're done."

He stood up and paused, looking at the missing door.

"This isn't a punishment," Shota said slowly, knowing Bakugou would see it as one anyways, "but you're bound to the dorms for the next few days unless you have an escort. House Arrest until you're fully recovered. No going outside, no going to classes. I want you to rest."

No response.

No yelling.

Confused, Shota turned to see Bakugou curled up on the unmade bed.

Passed out.

“Damn it,” he muttered to himself. He bent over and placed his hand on his student's forehead, but it was cool to the touch. A little too cool for Bakugou, but not dangerous. Pulse was steady, no outward signs of damage.

Whoever was messing with Shota's student was playing mind games. Working from the shadows. Cornering... hunting his student.

Gently, he pulled Bakugou all the way up onto the bed. Took his shoes off. Grabbed one of the clean blankets he'd brought and tucked the corners in. Bakugou didn't stir at all. The poor kid. He couldn't seem to catch a break, could he?

Shota pulled out his phone as he left the room. It barely had the chance to finish the first 'ring' before a man's voice picked up.

“Detective Tsukauchi speaking, what's the problem?”

“This is Aizawa from UA,” Shota cut straight to the point, “I need you to do me a favor.”

His phone was ringing.

Groggy and entirely too drained to deal with the stupidity the half-wits in his class deemed important, Katsuki glanced at the caller I.D with every intention of ignoring it. Instead, the name flashing on the front made him pause in confusion. He jerked to alertness, holding the phone steady in his shaking hands as he stared down at the cell phone in bewilderment and alarm. He forced his fingers to hit the 'receive' button.

“Katsuki?”

He rolled his eyes even though the other clearly couldn't see it, who else would be answering his phone? He leaned heavily against the wall as he sighed through his nose.

“Yeah?”

“I... um. You're coming home for the holidays, right?”

“Yeah, old man, I’ll be there.”

“Good. Good. I’m um... I’m trying out some new recipes.”

Oh. That was... great, actually. His dad had wandered back into the kitchen a while after permanently coming home, but he’d changed. Not trying anything new. Not whistling as he cooked. Moving about his favorite place in the house like he was a stranger in his own home.

“It’s about time,” Katsuki grunted out. “What did you have in mind?”

He clenched his fist. Rolled his shoulders. Anything to unstiffen his muscles and back. There was a concerning amount of cracks along his spine, but it felt good.

“Oh, I thought I’d start out small, you know? Maybe some snickerdoodles for the Carolers or maybe soy-marinated steak with soba noodles and Cajun spice. Nothing big.”

“Sounds fantastic.”

Katsuki rubbed at his neck, feeling awkward and unsure. He and his dad didn’t talk on the phone. It reminded him painfully of those few occasions his mom insisted dad call when she thought they’d lose him. A rasping, thin voice that didn’t even seem to understand it was Katsuki on the phone.

“I’ll be walking past that shop with the good shit you like,” Katsuki said after a minute of silence stretched between them. “I can pick you up a bunch of different spices and stuff.”

“Oh! Yes, um, well, how about we go together? You’re probably going to want to bring more than the usual bag with you right? Your game system? I can come pick you up?”

Katsuki pulled his mouth away from the phone so his dad couldn’t hear the noise of annoyance he made. The man always said everything like it was a question. It was an annoyance as all hell, but he didn’t want to hurt the old man’s feelings

“Sure,” he finally answered. “Sounds great.”

He had no intentions of bringing anything home with him. With his plans set, there was no need for stupid shit like games. Scoping out the various locations would take up all of his time. Plus holiday coursework if he had the extra time. Beating the Doctor took priority

above everything else. Even hero coursework

His dad made a noise of approval in his throat.

“Alright! Yes. You're released this upcoming Thursday, aren't you? Eight days from now?”

“Yes.”

There was another drawn-out silence that Katsuki felt he should break, but no words came to mind. They both sat there, listening to the other breathe. Unwilling to end the conversation.

“Er...” he heard his dad pause again. “Your mother showed me your grades. They came in the mail a few weeks ago? Top marks across the board. Third in your class, nearly tied for second. Top marks in your physical hero coursework. It seems as if you're doing amazing.”

Katsuki smirked.

“Did you expect anything less, old man?”

Like he'd let himself fall behind just because he was dealing with a fucked up psychopath bent on converting him or slicing him up for experimentation. Even with these handicaps and sleep deprivation and night terrors, he was still a fucking badass.

Maybe he looked like shit rolled in knitting needles, but his grade point average hadn't dropped a single fucking point. He was the top bitch and not one god damn fucking bastard was ever going to question that shit. Not for a fucking second.

His dad chuckled nervously.

“I never doubted you. You've always been talented.”

“Fuck talent. I worked my ass off for this.”

“I know,” his dad was quick to say, quick to placate. He really hated that. Like his dad was afraid to offend him or afraid of him. It left a bad taste in his mouth. Sure he yelled a lot, but he'd never, not once, ever raised his fists or his quirk at his dad.

“Don't let the old hag hear you praising me so much. She'll lose her shit on you.”

It was meant as a joke, but the awkward silence returned. His dad,

much like Deku, never seemed to be able to tell when he was joking. Katsuki found himself wondering what had compelled the old man to call now of all times when he hadn't gotten so much as a text from him since he'd moved into the Dorms.

"What are you doing this weekend?" His dad suddenly blurted out.

'Catching up on schoolwork, apparently,' Katsuki thought darkly as he remembered he was, essentially, on house arrest for the next few days. But then he remembered the 'special' training Aizawa had planned for them as well.

"Since it's the last weekend before we go on holiday, Aizawa is having us do a full-scale mock battle at the USJ. Said he has something special planned for us."

His dad sighed in what, oddly, sounded like disappointment.

"Oh."

Feeling entirely too off-kilter in his growing confusion, Katsuki wracked his brain to figure out what the hell his dad was doing. This was entirely out of character for the man and he was sick and tired of the roundabout questioning. He tried to sit up more, but his arms gave out under him and he grunted tiredly as he fell back onto the pillow.

"If there's something you need, old man, just spit it out."

"Nothing. I was just hoping we could hang out this weekend is all, but it can wait until the holidays."

What?

"Are you okay?" Katsuki asked, more than a little alarmed. "Has the Quirimorbus come back?"

"No! No! Definitely not! I just... well, I miss you, is all, and... and I would really like to... well, I thought it would be nice to hang out. Just the two of us."

Katsuki's brain came to a complete stop, gears grinding up against one another in a screeching display of bent metal and smoke.

"Is... is the old hag making you do this or something?" Katsuki asked slowly. He doubted this was a 'distance makes the heart grow fonder' moment. Had the old hag mentioned what Aizawa had told her? Was

his dad feeling guilty about fearing his own kid or about not liking him? Both of those were within his dad's normal pro quo. Feeling guilty about stupid shit he couldn't help.

"Is it so odd to think I'd want to hang out with my son?" His dad asked in a pained voice.

Oh yeah. The old man was definitely feeling guilty.

"No," Katsuki said slowly.

'Yes,' his mind supplied easily, *'it's really fucking weird.'*

He couldn't even remember the last time his dad had willingly spent time with him. There were a few moments here and there where his dad had forced himself to sit really close to him on the couch, his arms stiff and his eyes uncertain and panicky, a smile looking far too fake. Moments when he was clearly forcing himself to come into Katsuki room and sit on the end of the bed for conversations.

His dad always looked at Katsuki like he was terrified of him, like the act of conversing with him was painful, like he expected Katsuki to lose his mind at any second and blast the whole place to bits. It always hurt. Worse still, Katsuki was always rough and he always seemed to put his foot in his mouth when they were in the same breathing space for too long. His dad never seemed to get what Katsuki was trying to say and soon enough the man would flee and Katsuki would be left feeling like utter shit.

Nowadays he just tried to keep conversations short and to the point.

It was easier that way.

"I got tickets," his dad said after a moment. "It's um... it's a surprise where we're going, but it's right after holidays start. Just you and me for two days. I um... I designed you something for the event. No ties! Nothing around your neck, I know how you feel about that."

'He designed me something?'

A stupid, childish ball of excitement welled in his chest at that. He hadn't... not since... a deep ache formed in his chest for an entirely different reason. He felt like he was being tricked. Like he was being lulled into a false sense of security. Who was this man? Not his dad. Not for a long time. Why was he suddenly reaching out? Why was he calling him and talking nonsense? Wanting to hang out? Wanting to

talk to him? Designing him clothes?

Katsuki bit his lip hard, feeling the cool metal of the phone against his cheek and ear as his dad rambled about taking a boat to their destination and that they'd have to be ready the day after Katsuki got home and if going such a great distance would be permitted by the school when the League was still at large.

He felt distrust welling in his chest.

His thoughts wandered to the first meeting with the Doctor, how the man had him strapped down and had pulled out his dad's medical file along with his own. Was this another fucking manipulation? Was he even speaking to his dad?

He'd destroy whatever the Doctor loved most if this was some fucked up joke.

"Dad," Katsuki interrupted, feeling a touch of panic in his breath. "Dad, how did you propose to mom again?"

His dad made a noise of confusion.

"You know she proposed to me, Katsuki, Arashiyama Bamboo Grove where we were doing a shoot. Are you alright?"

Katsuki's laugh was breathless, maybe a little manic.

"Yeah, I'm good, how could I forget? You were, ah, you were saying?"

"If anything is wrong, you know you can tell me, right?"

Ending on another fucking question. Katsuki put his hand against his eyes, feeling fucking tears at the corner of them. He angrily wiped them away. Scrunching up his shoulder's in an effort to stop his shaking.

"Is it too much?" His dad's voice continued, sounding nervous. "It's too much, isn't it? This trip? I don't want to push you or anything."

Push him?

"What the fuck are you talking about, old man, it sounds great."

"Oh. Okay. Good. I'm glad. I was afraid you'd hate the idea."

Why would he... Katsuki chewed on the lip between his teeth. He

always tried to reign himself in around his dad. He always tried to be more behaved, quieter, more like fucking Deku when his dad was around. He'd tried everything to make his dad like him and had failed. How... How could his dad think that he didn't want to hang out with him?

Had Katsuki really been that shitty at trying?

"Course not," Katsuki mumbled. Unbalanced by the flip-flopping of his dad's attitude.

"I know winters not the best time to travel for you," his dad said uneasily. "And its been a rough year. I didn't want..."

Understatement of the fucking millennia.

"I'm not a fucking kid. I can handle the cold," he grunted out, trying to reassure the old man.

"I know! I know you're strong. I just know your quirk makes it a bit hard..."

Suspicion rolled in his stomach worse than before.

"Have you talked to Aizawa?"

"No? Should I have?" His dad asks sharply. He can hear the old man revving up for a concerned lecture even before he knows the fucking situation. God damn. This motherfucker was ridiculously hard to talk to.

"No." Strained silence stretched between them. Damn it all to hell. Why the fuck was he so bad at this? "So, I'll see you next Thursday..."

"I love you!" Dad blurted.

Katsuki blinked, frowning on his side of the phone, trying to sit up.

"I love you too. Are you sure nothings wrong?"

He moved too fast and a muscle stretched too far. He covered his mouth to hide the hiss, leaning against the wall at this point more for support than anything. The adrenalin from seeing his dad's name on his phone was beginning to wear off.

"Everything is fine," his dad said quickly. "I just miss you."

“You’re kind of weirding me out, old man,” Katsuki muttered.

It was hard to stay awake.

“Katsuki?”

“I’m just tired. You woke me up.”

“Isn’t it only four?”

“I guess.”

“Didn’t you go to classes today? I thought I was catching you getting out of classes.”

“I’m sick.”

“You’re sick?! Why are you sick? You should have called. Have you seen Recovery Girl?”

“Yes, I have,” Katsuki lied easily. “Aizawa’s making me stay in the dorms to get better for the next few days. They’re making me heated support gear to help me in everyday life instead of just hero gear.”

“That’s good, but you should have called.”

Katsuki turned over, curling under his blanket.

“Dad, can we argue about this shit later?”

He didn’t mean to, but exhaustion colored his voice and his dad’s next words were soft and understanding.

“Sure, bud, sure, I’ll see you on Thursday?”

“Mhm.”

He didn’t remember hanging up.

Denki trailed behind Kirishima as they made their way up the stairs. At a safe distance, of course, he’d heard what the redhead and Sero had done to Bakugou’s door and no one was going on that floor before

shit hit the fan.

It was going to be hilarious shit that hit the fan, but hilarious shit that Denki would not be taking the fall for. He still felt really, really, really guilty every time Bakugou went to lick his lips and the very tip of his tongue was missing. It wasn't much. No one noticed. Bakugou hadn't even said anything about what happened after that night, but Denki noticed because he was higher aware of it.

So anything to do with invading Bakugou's privacy or going into his room was a hell no for him. He'd learned his lesson and would not be doing a repeat performance. No siree! He was good.

"Bakugou! Hey man, I've got dinner for you, buddy!" Kirishima called, long before he was at the door-less room.

Smart move.

"There better be six and a half feet of fucking wood with you or you can take that fucking peace offering bullshit and stick it up your god damn ass!" Came the furious reply.

Denki cringed back at the sight that stumbled into view. Holy shit. Bakugou looked awful. Like... he looked like he'd crawled out of the forest after fighting all the earth monsters single-handedly and was left without food for two days after that and shocked awake every time he fell asleep.

"No door!" Kirishima said cheerfully. Denki took four giant steps back because his friend's balls needed the room. Bakugou was going to lose his absolute mind. "I've got some broth and bread rolls and like, six water bottles though!"

"Kirishima," the dark mutter, spoken like a warning, went completely ignored.

"Aizawa Sensei said that if you don't eat what I'm bringing you, he's going to force you to spend the next three days with Recovery Girl where she will be delivering your meals and I promise you, you'll get even less privacy there than a missing door."

There was a deadly silence as they both waited for Bakugou to make a decision. Finally, the temperamental blonde heaved a sigh, which somehow still managed to sound pissed off (now there was talent).

"Drop it off then get the fuck out. I don't want to deal with you

fucking assholes right now.”

Denki grinned, catching up to Kirishima and sharing a victory eye roll as they entered the room. He set down all the water bottles, a few by the bed and a few on the desk before plopping down on Bakugou’s computer chair.

“I gotta make sure you eat at least half of this,” Kirishima pronounced.

Bakugou scowled.

“If I fucking find out you’re bullshitting and he didn’t fucking say any of this, you’ll regret it, you hear me bastard?”

Kirishima, that brave fool, just grinned and shoved the soup in their friend’s hands. It was here that Denki noticed it. Bakugou’s hands were shaking. Frowning he watched the guy eat slowly. Man, he really was messed up right now.

“So, you want to know what happened in class today?” Denki asked, sitting on Bakugou’s other side.

“I’m assuming you don’t mean the fucking lesson that you should have been paying attention to,” Bakugou muttered.

“Nope.”

“I don’t care about your god damn gossip.”

“You suuuuuuuuuure about that Kacchan?” Bakugou scowled at him, but he didn’t tell him to stop so he took that as a ‘go on, I’m listening’ signal. “ ‘Cause we were talking about how the girls wanted to have a spa day and get away to relax after exams so of course us guys started talking too and we were thinking...”

“That we’d all get our nails done and talk about boys?” Bakugou said dryly. “No thanks.”

Kirishima snickered as Denki felt his face drop.

“Actually,” Denki said slowly, “I’m interning with Anchor and he invited us to climb really high rocks with him and then jump off of those really high rocks, which I hear is up your alley.”

Bakugou glared.

“Mina would want to come with us,” Bakugou pointed out.

“Yes, but if we take Mina the whole girl thing falls apart and then it becomes a class thing and Anchor invited a few of us, not the whole pack.”

“So it's not really a guy thing, it's just a couple of us getting together thing.”

Denki sighed dramatically.

“Technically yes, geez, sap the fun out of everything.”

Bakugou put the bowl down, his hands shaking too bad. Kirishima took the bowl holding it in his hands and gesturing between the three of them.

“Look,” the redhead said carefully, “it would be us, Sero, Tokoyami, and Shoji. Not too many people. A lot of fun and we get to hang out with a Pro-hero without it being training. Out in the mountains where there's no people. It'll be great!”

“Wow, Kiri,” Denki said laughingly, “you sound like your sales pitching.” He turned to his friend and gave him a side smile, watching the tired way Bakugou grabbed a bottle of water and sipped at it. Almost lethargic. “There's no pressure to say yes. If you're not up for it, then you're not up for it. We want you there, but if you're still sick, if you're still tired, if you just feel like being alone, it's okay. There's always next time, yeah? It would be freaking awesome if you come, but we don't want you to be out in the cold when you're already feeling like shit either. We're going Tuesday after school, we've got permission. It's like... five days from now.”

To Denki's surprise and delight, it looked as if Bakugou was considering it.

“Maybe,” Bakugou said slowly. “It depends on if you bastards magically find a fucking door before tonight.”

“I wasn't involved in the disappearing door act,” Kirishima lied.

Bakugou looked as if he believed that as much as Denki did.

“If you're done doing your charity case act for the day, get out,” Bakugou said, laying back down.

“Sero's making breakfast in the morning. I'm dragging you downstairs,” Kirishima warned him.

Denki laughed as he saw Bakugou flip them off. They left the blonde there, glancing at each other as they eyed the barely half-eaten bowl of soup. The look between them was full of worry and tension. It said a lot that Bakugou hadn't even asked them for class notes and he hadn't argued at all about other people cooking for him either.

"Maybe you should return his door," Denki suggested as they stepped onto the elevator.

Kirishima shook his head though.

"If something is happening at night, I want to be able to hear it. If anyone tries to attack him while we're sleeping, I want to be there."

"I don't think..."

"But what if?" Kirishima pressed. "Even if its just nightmares or Bakugou sneaking out or something we haven't thought of at all, then I want to stop him or help him or..."

"I get it, dude, I get it, but this doesn't feel right."

"None of this feels right," Kirishima muttered. "That's the problem."

"Pro-Hero Eraser Head, I wasn't aware you were still doing hero work on the side," Detective Tsukauchi said, shaking Shota's hand.

"I'm not. This is about one of my students."

The detective nodded.

"Right this way."

Shota was lead into a meeting room, though it was only the two of them. On the wide screen in front of him were a number of civilians and villains alike on the board. Eighty or so names lining the side. Shota frowned.

"All of these individuals have a quirk that can silence others?"

"Well," Tsukauchi said, carefully, "it's every person in Japan with a quirk that can directly or indirect silence either one or more

individuals. Its sort of a broad spectrum you gave me. You think one of your students has been silenced with a quirk?”

“I do.”

“Is there anything else you’ve noticed that might help us narrow our list?”

Shota considered.

“Bakugou is expressive, but every time I try to talk to him, he doesn’t just refuse to speak on the matter. He physically restrains himself from reacting. It’s not just about speaking, it’s like he...” Terrified was an odd word to put to Bakugou. It didn’t feel right. The kid was fearless. He threw himself against villains. He never hesitated, never doubted himself. Yet... there was no other word for what he’d been witnessing in his actions. “He’s terrified to give something away accidentally with a physical movement.”

“Hm... that’s a lot rarer,” Tsukauchi muttered. “Though, it could be a mind control quirk too.”

Shota stopped dead in his tracks, his mind going instantly to Shinso before shaking himself roughly. No. Never.

The detective expertly entered the new information, both expanding the search to include those quirks he thought within the spectrum and eliminating less powerful quirks on the list.

“What makes you so sure this is the work of a quirk and not simply...” the detective made a gesture towards his own head.

“Because I know my student.” Shota paused before admitting. “I’ve been keeping a close eye on him since he was kidnapped and it’s becoming more and more clear that something was done to him he can’t speak about.”

“Oh, that student,” Tsukauchi said grimly. Everyone knew about the infamous Kamino kidnapping and the subsequent retirement of All Might. “I didn’t immediately recognize the name, though I know Toshinori has mentioned him. I didn’t interview him myself after he was taken to the police station. I was head of asserting All For One was taken safely into custody and properly restrained.”

Shota nodded.

“He’s rough around the edges, but he’s a good kid.”

“Toshinori said much the same. Is there anything else you can think of? Any other clues? It doesn’t matter how small, I might be able to use it.”

Shota was reminded vividly of Midnight and the panic attack.

“What about quirks that know if something is written down? A quirk that is able to monitor all forms of communication? All forms of transferring information?”

The detective hummed under his breath.

“There’s ‘The Contractor’ whose quirk binds a person to the terms written in their own blood,” Tsukauchi said with a grimace. “If he’s involved then your students in real trouble. There aren’t many who can affect all forms of communication.”

“Who else?”

“Mental scape is a woman who can put forward a command in the mind of a person that they must obey, but students aren’t anywhere near her normal *modus operandi*. She’s a serial killer who considers herself a vigilante. She murders alleged rapists.”

“Alleged?”

“There’s usually not enough evidence to put them behind bars. She seems to believe that every man is guilty no matter insufficient evidence or contradicting time frames.”

“Who else?”

They went like that through a number of quirks, but there was nothing decisive. There were too many possible quirks and too little of their own evidence. Aizawa gathered the files up, a noise of frustration tickling his throat. He pressed his lips together though, stifling it.

“Thank you for all your help,” Shota shook the detective’s hand.

Tsukauchi then moved his hand onto Shota’s shoulder, a dark look taking over his face.

“I want you to look into something for me, Eraser Head, we have a tendency to... ah,” Tsukauchi cleared his throat. “When we see

problems like this, heroes tend to look for an outside source, but more often than not it's something closer to home. This might be a villain, but it also might be the kid's parents or a classmate. I know it's not an option that you want to consider, but..."

The thought that any of his students or the Bakugou's themselves could be behind such sinister actions left a bad taste in his mouth, but he'd been in the hero business long enough to know not to dismiss such expert advice from someone more experienced in these types of crimes.

"Yes, I understand. I'll keep that in mind."

"Bakugou is a strong kid, Eraser, stronger in heart than a lot of us first thought," Tsukauchi says softly. "All Might himself told me the kid is something else, if something or someone is truly going after your student like this... Bakugou won't go down without a fight."

"He won't go down at all," Shota promised.

Chapter 12: Eijiro Kirishima

Chapter Summary

BONUS CHAPTER

An unnecessary addition

This is Kirishima's story of how he became besties with Bakugou. A little unnecessary for the story, but it was a lot of fun to write and I thought you guys would enjoy reading it.

Honestly, I did not mean to keep going into the past, but after I wrote it, both past scenes just felt... right. It really explores why and how Kirishima became Bakugou's best friend and vice versa.

Chapter 12: Eijiro Kirishima

Eijiro smiled nervously at his own reflection, doubt seeming as clear to see as the red in his eyes. No matter how long he stood in front of the mirror though, he couldn't get his smile to relax.

He wanted Bakugou to feel like the extra effort they were putting in for him was because he was their friend, not because they felt like it was an obligation. He knew how prone to doubt the guy was even if he never mentioned it. How Bakugou thought they were so obsessed with the hero complex that they often did things because they thought it was the right thing to do rather than any real, genuine trust and love they felt for Bakugou himself.

Eijiro knew that was why Bakugou had such a hard time with Midoriya and his group of friends. And vice versa. Bakugou assumed anything they did for him came out of their own desires to be good heroes. Good people. While Iida, Todoroki, Ururaka, and Midoriya all assumed Bakugou resisted and resented their friendship because of pride or stubbornness.

Eijiro tried explaining that they really did care about him, but Bakugou's scuff and the rolling of his eyes were enough to know that his best friend didn't believe him at all. Maybe about Midoriya he did, but that was a long, hard-fought semi-friendship crafting from horrible

misunderstandings and clashing personalities.

About a week after Bakugou's fight with Midoriya and after their house arrest ended, Eijiro started pushing to know what it had been all about. He'd demanded to know why Bakugou was always so hostile towards Midoriya for seemingly no reason.

"We were best friends as little kids," Bakugou admitted to him one night. "As we got a little older though, I started to hate it. Hate him."

Eijiro frowned.

"Why?"

"It was horrible to be his friend. When we were kids and we hung out? He was so nice. He was soft and helpful and always fucking complimenting people. Always telling me I was great."

"Okay?"

Eijiro really didn't see what was wrong with that. He kind of expected Bakugou to say something bad about Midoriya. Well, not bad per say, but something like Midoriya was weak and cried a lot and Bakugou hadn't wanted to deal with it. This though, naming off of these great qualities was a bit odd.

"I felt like a monster when we hung out."

Eijiro's breath caught. Watching Bakugou looking out the window, avoiding looking at him.

"Everything I was, was wrong. I'm not kind or soft and I don't know how to be nice. I hated being around him because he never got me. He always misunderstood what I was saying and I was always making him cry. It felt like... he always made me feel like I was this demonic spawn. He was this... he never... all the adults thought he was this perfect little angel cause he was always so god damn nice about everything. They were always telling me I was... awful and shit. I didn't hate Deku then, I just..." Bakugou waved his hand. "I just wanted to get away from him and be myself without feeling horrible about being myself."

"So you pushed him away?"

Eijiro figured that if Bakugou at sixteen was awful at emotions, he must have been absolute trash at it as a little kid. He could see the

fiery blonde yelling to be left alone and storming away, leaving a really confused Midoriya behind. He felt bad for both of them. He wondered if Bakugou had ever told Midoriya the reasoning or if the poor guy was still in the dark about it.

Bakugou plopped down on the bed next to him.

“Pushed him. Shoved him. Threw dirt in his face. I told him to get lost and he came back the next day and the next and the next. I started saying fucked up things on purpose and... it got out of hand. I started to hate him. Really hate him. I resented that he was such a goodie-two-shoes and that no matter how hard I tried, I could never be that. He fucking...”

Sparks flew from his palms.

“He always came back. It was like having this shadow hovering over my shoulder telling me how everything I was and everything I did was fucking wrong and awful. It seemed like he was always trying to... he was always telling me I was being mean. When I would make a joke or when I'd be honest about something or... fuck man. He even said my class photo was scary when I was just fucking smiling!”

Bakugou was yelling now and Eijiro stood perfectly still, watching as his best friend stood and started pacing the room. Sparks flying much faster now. He'd heard, of course Midoriya's side here and there, but Bakugou had always taken a wall of silence to the unspoken tension between them.

“He never fucking stopped either. I'd beg him to leave me alone, to just fucking give up on being friends with me and he'd still fucking be there! I started pushing harder and harder and saying worse and worse shit, but he'd still come back! Always fucking judging me for how I spoke and what I did and...”

Bakugou was breathing hard now, agitation showing in every line of his body, every tremor. Eijiro could see it so clearly. Like watching jingo blocks stacked on top of each other, misunderstandings and such different viewpoints making their way on top of one another. Bakugou was horrible at social ques and social interactions. His blunt honesty and harsh views and worse vocabulary clashing against Midoriya's over analysis, his tendency to take things literally, his sometimes too innocent nature.

“I went too far,” Bakugou bites out. “I know I did. I couldn't figure out how to make him stop and I went too far trying to get him to leave me

alone. In middle school..." Bakugou grimaced, he stopped pacing. "God damn it. It was such shitty luck, we always had the same homeroom teacher. We were always in the same class together. By time we were halfway through middle school, if the shitnerd so much as breathed in my direction, I fucking tore him down. I said awful shit. Stuff I wouldn't ever say to anyone else. Not now and not then. It was like... the nicer he was the more I just fucking couldn't stand him. Like every nice thing he did was fucking mocking me for what I wasn't."

The sparks finally died down as Eijiro tried to let that soak in. Poor Midoriya. He felt torn, a part of him wanting to say something about what he thought, the other part telling him that Bakugou clearly knew. Bakugou wasn't sugar coating his actions, he wasn't trying to play the victim, he was being his blunt self. Telling him exactly what he'd done, but also how he'd spiraled down into those actions in the first place.

"There was no escape. He was in my classes, we went in the same direction home, our mom's are best friends and they'd drag us over to each other's houses. It was like... the whole fucking world wanted us to be friends and I was the only one who couldn't get with the program. I was always being told I needed to be more like Deku, that I should act like Deku, talk like Deku, BE fucking Deku. They wanted me to be this fragile, nice, fucking goodie-two-shoes, a fucking bright fucking unicorn that pisses compliments and vomits apologies for fucking breathing."

Eijiro wasn't sure what to say, how to respond. It sounded a lot like how a lot of their classmates viewed Bakugou now. No one wanted him to act like Deku, but most of them thought he needed better 'qualities.' Bakugou did need to be nicer, to consider other people's feelings, be more empathetic, but Eijiro wondered how much Bakugou confused that with people wanting him to change his personality. It was his attitude their class wanted Bakugou to improve, but his personality was fine.

He'd heard though, what the news outlets had to say. What some of their classmates had to say. What even some in Class 1B had to say. If that was like the stuff Bakugou had been dealing with for his whole life, with people attacking who he was, his personality, rather than his attitude, then it was no wonder Bakugou was so defensive and angry.

"And then!" The smile that spreads across Bakugou's face is sharp and bitter. "And then we were the only two students at our middle school

to get into UA, into the hero course, into Class 1A. Same fucking school, same fucking class, again, and everybody loves him. First god damn assignment has us pitted against each other... with me playing the villain."

The sound that comes out of Bakugou's mouth is not a laugh. Its ugly and manic and cracks and it makes Eijiro winces. He remembers that day. Everyone does. Knowing what Bakugou's mindset was going in made everything a lot worse than even what Kirishima had imagined.

"I lost my ever-loving mind," Bakugou says distantly. "All I could think about was how it was happening all over again. How Deku would always be known as the nice kid reminding the demon child that he was a fucking demon. All I wanted was to beat him into the ground so hard that he never got up again. Just this... bubbling hatred and nothing else. I didn't fucking strategize, I didn't think, I didn't consider anything or anyone. To me it was just me and Deku and this... this fucking need to prove I didn't have to be like him, that I didn't need to be a nice person to dominate in the field. I could be myself and win."

The sound leaks out from his mouth again. Like cracking glass.

"Course I was proven wrong. I got so deep into proving I wasn't a monster, that I was fine the way I was, that I became exactly that."

"Bakugou..." Eijiro finally stuttered out. "Hey man, you messed up, it doesn't mean you're a monster."

Something twisted pulls at his friend's mouth that's not a smile.

"Maybe not, but I'm the stuff monsters are made of."

"You can't really think that," Eijiro breathed out in horror. "You can't really... you know none of us think of you like that, right? Maybe you did some stuff you regret, but you regret it! We all make mistakes." He thought of those two girls in front of the aggressive man that day. How he'd stood frozen. A coward. "We all have our faults. This right here though? What you're doing? Trying to be better, learning how to help people, working with all of us to be heroes? Owning up to your mistakes? That's manly as hell. You've come a really long way from being how you acted in that fight with Midoriya in that first assignment."

Bakugou shakes his head, his hands are shaking.

“Hands bastard wanted me because he thought I’d make a great villain,” Bakugou says bitterly. “Violent. Merciless. Savage. Someone restrained by society, who could be a real monster with the right materials.”

“Stop it!” Eijiro grabbed Bakugou’s shoulder. His friend’s eyes distant. “You are not a monster. Never have been and never will. You had a shit attitude at the start of the year, but your attitude isn’t who you are. It’s not what makes up who you are. It’s not your personality.”

“I didn’t tell you so you could give me a pep talk, you know,” Bakugou muttered. “I’m not asking you to fucking comfort me with a bunch of bullshit. I’m telling you, to own up to my own bullshit.”

Eijiro growled in annoyance.

“Todoroki had a shit attitude too. He was cold and angry and detached from everybody and no one, not one person in the class thinks he’s cold or angry or detached. He’s a good person. We just had to dig underneath that brooding mess of his to get to know him.”

“Half and half bastard never fucking did the shit I did,” Bakugou debunks him. “No one calls him a monster. No one thought he was villain material.”

“You sure, bro? Cause I remember an entire stadium telling Sero it was okay he lost because of how utterly savage Torodoki was to him in the match. He buried me and Tetsu alive in ice without a thought, even though we were literally the only two students he could have done that to without ending up in Recovery Girls office.”

Bakugou had nothing to say to that.

“I meant what I said. None of us perfect. And besides, the villains were wrong, you proved that when you fought them against impossible odds. You’ve proved that by being who you are; passionate and stubborn and freaking smart. You’re not a monster and I don’t ever want you to say something so fucked up ever again. Got it?”

For a moment, Bakugou’s mouth turns down and he bit savagely on his bottom lip, looking as if he might break, but he straightens instead and smirks.

“I didn’t scare you off of being my friend then?” His tone is joking, but there’s a seriousness in his eyes, in the stiff way he’s holding himself. Eijiro nudges him.

“Of course I’m not your friend,” Eijiro says in offense, he sees the way Bakugou practically becomes stone and hurries on. “I’m your best friend and you’re delusional if you think for even a second I’d turn my back on you. You’re stuck with me Blasty.”

Bakugou lets out a shaky breath and grins.

“Shitty hair, didn’t you have some homework or some shit you needed to show me. You know... before I fucking got all gross and emotional on you.”

Eijiro sputters in horror as he sees the time on the clock. Oh man. They were totally going to miss pizza night.

Eijiro thinks of that conversation now as he tries to calm his nerves. Its been months since they rescued Bakugou and the conversation feels like it happened a lifetime ago. The words still bothered him.

Every time he saw Bakugou talking to one of their classmates. Interacting with people, trying to be friendly. He wondered if Bakugou still thought of himself as a monster. He wondered what their friends would think or how they’d react if they ever found out. They all thought of Bakugou as a grump, but a good friend. Someone who cared more about getting the job done than protecting people’s feelings. Bakugou went out of his way to help them and who had his own way of showing he cared even though he’d never admit it in a million years.

Eijiro tried to smile, but the face that looked back at him in the mirror seemed forced. He’d been stressed lately. Worried as he was for Bakugou, and it was actually getting to him now.

Deciding that this was the best he was going to get and Sero would be pissed if the food got cold while he was up here dicking around, Eijiro threw on his shoes and marched over to Bakugou’s door. Er. To his room, seeing as his door had been... ‘misplaced.’

There was a moment of panic when he realized the lumps on the bed were not human but soft linen and pillows. He stopped dead in his tracks, craning his neck to look out onto the balcony to see if Bakugou was just getting some air.

“Bakugou! Are you here!”

If he sounded panicked, well, no one else was around to hear it. At least, no one but Bakugou. Grumpy muttering came from the small bathroom and relief like nothing before filled his chest. Ejiro leaned against the wall because he felt so shaken. He'd left his door open and had been up half the night listening in and if something had happened despite all of that, he wasn't sure if he'd ever be able to sleep again.

The door cracked open and Ejiro blinked in shock. Bakugou was... taking earbuds out, wrapped in his blanket. With a pillow in one arm. There was no way, absolutely not.

"Did you... sleep in the bathroom?" Ejiro shrieked.

Bakugou flipped him off, dropping the blanket and pillow on the floor and stumbling over to his dresser. He pulled out his mouth guard and putting it on a towel on the desk.

"Duuuuuuuuuude, Bakugou, why?"

"Because I fucking wanted to? Fuck off."

"You can't seriously care that much about privacy that you'd sleep on the cold hard bathroom floor!"

"If you're so concerned then tell me where my fucking door is," Bakugou growled back. The blonde sent him one last glare before slamming the bathroom door in his face, clothes in hand.

"That can't be good for you," Ejiro said through the door. "You're already not in the best of health."

He couldn't hear what Bakugou's reply was but if the dark, murderous noises were any indication of what those words might be, he was probably best off not knowing. When the door finally popped back open, the glare was... impressive.

"If my bathroom door goes missing for any reason..." Bakugou said quietly, eyes like two murderous red bulbs against a face promising pain and death. "I will piss in your bed and you will never remove that from your mattress, no matter how hard you fucking try. Is that understood?"

Ejiro shuddered, nodding as Bakugou gave a satisfied smirk and marched past him and towards the elevator down the hall.

When he'd set out to make friends with Bakugou, back at the start of the school year, after the USJ attack, he'd never have imagined that the volatile, hot head would become a close friend. He definitely would never have imagined in a million that Bakugou would wheedle his way into becoming Eijiro's best friend.

If he was honest, his only goal going in had been to maybe loosen the guy up a little bit. Figure out what made the guy tick. Help him come out of his shell a little bit. As time went on though and he saw glimpses of the person underneath it all, he felt himself seeing what Modoriya talked about in admiring the guy. A far too serious attitude mixed in with dark humor, a dash of arrogance, and a tendency towards over dramatics. The guy was passion incarnate and Eijiro found that passion helped him to move forward, to not think about his own insecurity and to think about what needed to be done. Before he knew it Bakugou had clamped down on his heart and wedged his way into the label of best friend.

"The guy that can't remember your name?" His mom had blurted out when he told her they were hanging out together. "How'd that happen?"

"Er... I mean, he doesn't communicate like normal people do and I kind of realized that? During the Sports Festival?" He grinned at his mom's quirked eyebrows. "I don't know. I invited him to hang the next day and he surprised me by saying yes. Then I sort of egged him on to tutor me for the exams and..." Eijiro shrugged. "He's never said no when I ask to hang. Its hilarious, really, he comes off as this total isolationist, but he's just bad at communicating."

"Alright... as long as he's showing you respect now."

Eijiro snickered.

"When you listen to him, you sort of have to delete all the cursing around his words, cause what he's actually saying is usually really cool. Like..." He screwed up his face. "Is it okay to quote him? To show you...?"

She sighed dramatically.

"If it means it adds to the explanation."

Eijiro grinned sheepishly, feeling a bit weird. His mom rarely cursed, but she also made a point that curse words were just that; words. The negative connotations certain words had were culturally created, as

was the power those same words had. Curse words only had as much power to hurt as you allowed them to have. It was more about the intentions of the use and what they said about the intentions of the person rather than judging a person for using them.

His mom was a pretty smart woman.

“Bakugou was talking to Koda, the shy guy with the animal communications quirk?” His mom nodded to show she knew. “Well Bakugou is working with him for an exercise we’re doing and Koda’s not so confident in himself. Bakugou says to him; “Stop fucking cowering you piece of shit! You could have this whole fucking forest at your beck and call in an instant if you wanted to! Get the god damn bugs to swarm! Have the fucking birds peck their damn eyes out! Have the raccoons slice them to fucking pieces! You’re not a god damn extra so stop fucking acting like it!”

Eijiro shakes his head.

“Koda, of course, freaks out at Bakugou yelling at him. Everyone starts ganging up on Bakugou for being mean, but honestly? The guy was just saying that Koda should have confidence in himself because his quirk was amazing and that the possibilities within his grasp are basically endless.”

“But because of how he expressed those feelings, he was treated like the bad guy,” his mom said thoughtfully.

“Exactly! And Bakugou’s so used to being the bad guy that he doesn’t try to explain himself and the guy doesn’t have a gentle bone in his body so he just frowns and snaps back when the others reprimand him.”

“He should consider a communication course then. Unfortunately the world isn’t going to change for him so he needs to adapt to it. Especially if he’s aiming to be a hero.”

Eijiro nodded slowly.

“I don’t think he realizes just how terrible he is at talking to people. He thinks he’s being blunt.”

“Well, technically, he is, but he isn’t being clear and the curse words are a hindrance for the message he’s trying to convey. Plus from what you told me, his body language and volume further bury and mislead the intent.”

"I don't think he does those on purpose," Eijiro said carefully. "Mostly because he always seems so tense all the time. Except during classes or on the training field. Its crazy, he's super relaxed when we're doing assignments or exams and when he's in the middle of fighting, otherwise though..."

"So, between tasks, when there's the potential for interacting with other people in a social manner, you mean?" His mom noted idly.

Eijiro blinked.

"I... never thought of it that way."

That made a ridiculous amount of sense.

"I bet anything in the world that the less people are around the more relaxed he'll be. When you guys hang out, try picking places that don't have a lot of people. Ask him what he likes to do, its probably something that's secluded."

And, of course, his mom was right. What was more secluded than hiking in the mountains? The flip of anxiety in Bakugou's head seemed to switch off when it was just the two of them hanging out and was so far removed from the volatile reactions when they were in class that it left him feeling like he was suffering from whiplash.

The more people around, the more tense Bakugou was, the less people, the funnier Bakugou got. The guy's dry humor and intelligence really showed through when they hung out just the two of them. He almost seemed a completely different person.

He told Ashido this and she'd laughed, but one by one she and Kaminari and Sero were dragged along and they saw it for themselves. The way Bakugou sort of melted in his tension when it was only a few people. Hearing him make jokes and the minute allowances he allowed when it came to heckling him and...

The lot of them also saw the opposite.

The way when they moved into a crowd Bakugou got quieter, how his shoulders tensed up and he was more likely to snap to snarl to glare to threaten. How he was uncomfortable when too many people crowded around him. How he picked the lunch table as far away from heavy noise and people as possible.

None of them laughed after that.

They got it.

They also made a point of trying to push those obvious limits too. Not too much. But where Bakugou preferred to watch movies in one of their rooms, they tried to get him to watch it in the living room as much as possible. Where Bakugou tried to limit study sessions to only one or two of them at a time, they pushed for three.

Now here he was, dragging Bakugou down to breakfast.

The ash blonde looked grumpier than usual, dark circles under his eyes. Huddled in a hoodie and scarf even though they were inside.

“Ah, don’t you think that’s a bit much?” Eijiro tries gently.

“Shut up.”

He holds up his hands in defeat, fighting off the grin that’s trying to spread across his face.

“Alright, fine, but you know Kaminari is going to make fun of you, right?”

‘And Sero and Ashido,’ he thinks, but doesn’t say. Those two, at least, were smart enough to let Kaminari make the first move, and depending on Bakugou’s reaction, would join in. He loved his bro Kaminari, but the guy spoke first and thought later. He had a brain underneath all that static electricity, but he chose to go with the flow instead, to only think when it was absolutely necessary.

“Blasty!” Eijiro hides a snicker as Ashido glomps the ash blonde as soon as they get off the elevator, watching fondly as she puts her arm through his and drags him forward, talking his ear off about all that Sero has cooked up for them.

Bakugou does not look content to allow this to happen, but appears too tired to put up a fight over it. He can see Sero finishing the french toast as Kaminari sets down the plates, the electric user looking delighted upon spotting the three of them, and then his eyes land on Bakugou.

“Hoah, dude, you look like hell froze over and you crawled out of it!”

‘Here we go,’ Eijiro thinks as he watches Ashido spit laughing and Bakugou puff up like an indignant rooster.

“Fucking try me, sparks, I dare you.”

“What are you going to do? Depress me to death?”

A mini explosion goes off and Eijiro can't help but think it sounds like home.

Chapter 13: Bullshit

Chapter Summary

Bakugou recovers fully after his fight with the Doctor's Nomu, encountering Eri, Kirishima, Kaminari and Sero throughout the day.

Chapter Notes

Last chapter of this arc. It will be a hell of a lot of action from here on out starting next chapter. Just had to set up a few more things with this chapter and we are ready to launch into quite the wild ride.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter 13: Bullshit

Eri is in the kitchen.

Katsuki has half a mind to turn back around and grab something to eat later, but he quickly dismisses that cowardly thought. It's not like he hates the kid, he's just never been *good* at dealing with them. Like a fire is burning down a house and instead of water, all he has is his own flames to put it out. His own bare hands to pat out the roaring fire.

He still remembers the last time he was stuck alone with the girl and he cringes at the idea of making a repeat performance. *Fucking Deku*. So he holds his head high and marches in there as if he knows what the fuck he's doing. Puts the kettle on. Warms up some meat buns. Carefully pulls down his special brand of black tea, inhaling the scent of fresh, bitter herbs.

Behind him, Eri fidgets.

The little girl has a plate loaded with cut veggies and slices of peach, but she doesn't leave the kitchen immediately. He can feel her eyes staring at him and he *knows* in the way he remembered Deku with that same god damn expression that she wants to talk to him. It strikes

him, the familiarity he sees in her. The same stupid fucking hesitance and meekness, the same giddiness, bordering on excited but more subdued.

There is a need to squash that shit with his heel. To pound it down as hard as he can. He doesn't *want* to have to be nice. He doesn't want to answer questions and he doesn't want to have a kid trailing behind him.

'Why do you have to be such a brute, Katsuki?'

'We were just playing! I was the Villain, I was supposed to be mean!'

'It seems to come too naturally to you.'

'Katsuki! Why can't you be gentle?! Look what you've done!'

'What did you say to him? Why is Izuku crying?'

'I just told him he's not going to be like All Might cause he's too nice! You have to be really strong and...'

'What is wrong with you?'

'I... I just meant he's gonna be like the rescue...'

'Fuck Katsuki, can't you think before you talk?'

'What did you do?!'

'We were just playing! I swear we...'

'Go to your room. Honestly... sometimes...'

'Auntie!'

'Katsuki-chan, what happened?'

'We were... we were playing and my hands sparked.'

'You need to be more careful! This isn't the first time you've hurt him. Katsuki-chan, maybe... maybe you shouldn't... sigh. Just be more careful.'

'You'll never be a hero if you keep this up Katsuki. Izuku isn't like you. He's sweet and kind and you need to keep that in mind when you play. You're too rough. Izuku isn't the only kid you've hurt. You understand that right? I've gotten complaints from numerous parents about you. You have to restrain yourself. You can't go all out on your friends or people will start to treat you like you're a monster. Because you're acting like one.'

It was better to keep people at a distance. He wasn't nice or gentle or kind. Better not to touch and better not to hover too close. Because the house always ended up being a pile of fucking ash. No matter how much he burned himself trying to put out the flames.

"Um," Eri's voice sounded.

Katsuki looked up, giving the little girl a blank stare.

"Do you..." she bit her bottom lip, her feet moving from side to side anxiously. "Do you want to eat lunch with me?"

She gestured to the table, her face hopeful. The microwave beeped and Katsuki pulled out the buns, setting them down on the counter and cutting into the tops to let them cool down a bit faster before glancing at her.

"No."

Her face fell. Her shoulders slumped and looked down at the floor. She bit her bottom lip as she stood awkwardly with the plate in her hands for a moment too long. Katsuki turned his back to her. Adding boiling water to his tea before pulling down some Jasmine and putting the herbs in a much smaller cup. A few sugar cubes and some honeysuckle dew from Yaoyorozu's special cabinet.

Katsuki set his own stuff aside before blowing on the second tea, the light green hot liquid smelling overly sweet for his taste. He could hear Eri's light footsteps pitter-patter off to the table, glass clinking against wood and chair legs scarping as she pulled it out to sit. He

walked up behind her, putting the teacup down. The noise was enough to jolt her in surprise, too big eyes staring up at him questioningly.

“Let this sit for a few minutes before you drink it. It’s too hot now,” Katsuki told her.

Those eyes that were too kind and too gentle for him to take blinked up at him slowly before looking at the tea. She nodded, looking down furtively at her plate, fiddling with her fork. Katsuki, feeling like he’d been here too long, grabbed his own tea and food and heading towards the door.

“Thank you.”

He stopped.

“Whatever, it’s not a big deal.”

“I think you make a really good big brother.” Katsuki stopped in his tracks at her words, the sound of his neck creaking as he turned to her with incredulous annoyed eyes.

“What?!”

Eri did not look up from her plate. She’d pulled the tea to her, her fingers moving up and down the cup as if to warm her fingers.

“Izuku talks about you all the time,” she says, talking to the cup. “He’s worried about you, you know. You said he was like a brother to you and I think he looks at you the same way.”

Katsuki snorted. He wasn’t sure what to do with the feelings those words invoked in him, wasn’t even sure how to name them, and he didn’t plan on thinking too hard on them either. He regretted saying anything to the kid. They were always so nosy.

“Yeah, well, Deku’s an idiot like that.”

He left the girl alone in the kitchen.

Going back to his own room to be just as alone.

Just like old times.

The worst kind of nightmares are those that you know are a nightmare while you're having it. Because in those nightmares, every time you fuck up, you go back to the start and it replays until you get it right or jerk awake in a cold sweat. You know you're being hunted or your falling or that the house is haunted and you want to get the fuck out, but you know it's a dream, that it's all happening inside your head and those kinds of nightmares, at least for Katsuki, are the worst.

There's one nightmare in particular that has been happening more and more often. It involves the Doctor and the Nomu's. He always wakes up with a jerk, as if electrocuted, gasping for breath. There's a pain in his chest all too familiar and Katsuki thinks the fucker must have done it again while he was sleeping. Or the pain had lasted so long into the night that somehow Katsuki had fallen asleep through in from pure exhaustion.

Tonight, Katsuki knows he's suffering from a nightmare, *the nightmare*, before he even opens his eyes. There's the familiar floating feeling in his limbs and he's tied up. Quirk suppressant chains wrapping around his arms and hands, chains weighing down his feet. There's metal around his neck and tubes in his nose and a breathing mask over his mouth.

He squirms and withers and screams, but it's muffled. He can't move.

The Doctor stands before the glass and smiles at him, fucking smiles, with his hands out in front of him, folded. The circular specs hide his eyes and those ridiculous eyebrows go up as the man tilts his head.

"Such a beautiful specimen."

Revulsion courses through him. He wants to move back, his bare feet hit glass as he kicks away from him.

"I'm going to have so much fun with you."

Weak. His limbs are weak and he feels fragile. Not like himself. He feels fatigue and pain so deep in his bones that it must be his entire world. He wants to cry in frustration. The fucker sits down and looks Katsuki up and down with this leering air about him. Katsuki shudders and bucks, trying to rip his arms out of the locks, his back hitting glass as he floats into it.

Because in his nightmares he's always in a fucking test tube like the ones he saw when being dragged in by the Compress freak. The Nomu are always in the background, swaying and moaning and saying nonsense to one another.

The Doctor sits down in his chair and just... fucking stares at Katsuki, like he's some fascinating lab rat. He bares his teeth as much as he can, which isn't much at all. In his nightmare's the Quirimorbus is always in effect. It always hurts so bad and he finds himself feeling fucking vulnerable in front of the one motherfucker Katsuki can't stand the idea of being vulnerable in front of.

Even All for FUCKING one doesn't bring this kind of terror out in him and Katsuki hates it. Hates that just seeing this cunt ass pedophile fucker makes him feel weak and makes his stomach turn like he wants to vomit.

Katsuki hates himself for that reaction.

He hates that out of all the villains he faces this... this overweight middle-aged fucker who looks like he couldn't complete the mile in under *a fucking year*... this motherfucker is the one that most definitively haunts his nightmares. That the act of doing *nothing*- of just... of just sitting there and watching him is what has Katsuki mentally begging for it to be over, for it all to stop. For him to go away.

Even fighting the Nomu is better than this.

Even suffering from the Quirimorbus is better than this.

Katsuki would volunteer to fight the League of Villains again if the alternative was being in a room alone with this piece of trash for an hour. One who makes his skin crawl and makes him feel dirty even though the cunt hasn't actually done anything like *that*. Makes him want to take long hot showers and scrub it all away.

All wires and pain and horror and *suggestions of the dirty kind*...

"I wonder how you're handling it," The Doctor says casually, pulling out a newspaper of all things, the geezer. That's probably one of the things that drives him the most crazy about these nightmares. The Doctor is always doing something stupidly normal. "How does it feel to know you ended your hero's career?"

And All Might stares up at him from ink, the emaciated form speaking

at a news conference on the front of the newspaper. Toshinori. He's smiling and waving and the black of his eyes shows more prominently against his much thinner face.

'Fuck you.'

It's like a mantra that occasional mingles with more vial curse words and inventive death threats. Sometimes the Nomu wander over and stare at him which is both ominous as fuck and completely inaccurate. He's never seen them be docile, but in his nightmares, they always act like over-glorified house cats. Wandering around and judging the ever-living fuck out of everything that breathes, occasionally paying attention, but always with a blank stare. Exactly like fucking cats.

"I imagine its a touchy subject for you," the Doctor drones on. "Your face lit up so spectacularly when he came to save you. Like all your hopes and dreams had come true. All in vain though, hm? He doesn't know that you belong to me."

'I belong to no one,' he thinks furiously. 'I'll fucking kill you. I swear I'll skin you alive and drag you're flailing body behind me across the asphalt. I'll dig every piece of fucking sand into your god damn pores, you little weaselly piece of shit, and then I'll fucking replace your skin with hot wax so you can just fucking sit forever with the pieces of fucking dirt and filth crawling inside you.'

His threats get very elaborate when he dreams.

They always ended the same though.

The pain becomes unbearable, like falling in a dream and the jolt that happens right before you hit bottom, and he wakes up clawing at his own skin. Sometimes he screams and sometimes he's able to muffle the sound, but either way, it usually is only a few seconds before he's able to capture the noise in his throat. Swallow it down with the pain wracking his body.

The nightmare was especially bad tonight.

Tonight the Doctor put his hand on the glass and licks his lips as he eyes him up and down and Katsuki... Katsuki wakes up and instead of a scream, he projectile vomits across his floor. He's sweaty and hurting, but the nightmare has left him feeling terror he's unfamiliar with. There's hair on his pillow and with a grimace, he realizes he must have been tugging it out in his sleep. A whole new level to the anxiety shit. There's light filtering through his window.

It's morning already.

Birds are chirping and Katsuki doesn't feel guilty about imagining sending an explosion their way and roasting them for their fucking nerve. Christ. Shit. Don't they know he's fucking losing it? He can't deal with fucking birds too.

The exhaustion is bad.

Like a soaking wet rag doll, he moves his limbs, ripping off his bedsheets and tossing them in the hamper. He soaks a towel in hot water and crawls along the floor until he's able to half-heartedly scrub at his carpet. That quickly goes in the hamper as well and he knows, he knows damn well that he's going to regret not taking them to laundry room immediately, that they'll reek to high heaven if they sit in the basket, but there is nothing that can make him care in that moment.

Not after *that* kind of nightmare.

The silence of his bedroom is awful. It reminds him a little too much of his house. Long nights where the only noise is the creaking of the floorboards and the whistle of wind outside his window. He feels the itch.

The itch is as aggravating as it is humiliating and stupid.

The itch was a feeling, an urge, that had him leaving his home at night and ending up on Deku's doorstep at the apartment complex. Fingers touching the door, pacing in front of it, but never actually knocking. Cause Katsuki would never allow himself to go that far. No matter how desperate he felt.

So instead he'd stand outside of Deku's door in the middle of the night like a fucking idiot for an hour or two before turning away and slouching home. Feeling all sorts of miserable and guilty and angry for days on end afterward.

An itch for... human contact. To not be alone. To hear the sound of someone else breathing beside you. To feel as if the void hadn't swallowed him whole when he wasn't looking.

Katsuki glanced out of his doorway.

There were lots of doors outside of his own. Lots of people inside those doors. Katsuki grabbed at his wrist, moving his fingers along his

skin, feeling his pulse, reminding himself that he didn't fucking need to knock on those doors. He was alive. He was fine. He didn't need another person to remind himself of that.

It was weak thinking.

Everyone would be up in a few hours. There would be plenty of noise if he was just fucking patient, if he didn't act like a dipshit and go waking up innocent fucking assholes with his little problem. The extras would make *too much* noise. They would fill the halls with ridiculous none sense and stupid fucking babbling and ridiculous cheerfulness way too fucking early in the morning.

Katsuki would be fine.

He wasn't a child who needed attention. He didn't need to bug other people. He was stronger than that. Better than that. He wasn't fucking soft. He wasn't a god damn pussy ass bitch. He could handle the silence.

...

...

...

Fuck it.

Katsuki is irrationally proud of the loud squawk of surprise he hears when he pounds on Kirishimas door, deriving far too much pleasure from the panicked 'coming!' that bursts forth and the sound of things being knocked over.

His door still hasn't been returned so its all fair game.

He does, however, lean against the wall and let his head hit the frame as he tries to stay conscious. His body whispering how nice it would be to slide down the wood and pass out on the frame rather than the effort of waiting standing up. The door swings open not even a second later. A mop of tangled red hair greets him, mouth opening in a

surprised 'O' as Kirishima takes him in.

"Uh, hi Bakugou, you okay?"

The sound of Kirishima's voice is a balm on his soul. It reminds him that he's here, at school, with his friend, and not in *that* place. He hadn't quite realized how much he'd needed another person to just... talk to him until that moment.

Katsuki doesn't say anything, doesn't have the energy to, besides, he's still wearing his mouthguard. He pushes past the bewildered redhead and plops down on the larger than an average futon and topples over onto it, curling into himself as he does so.

"Bakugou?!"

He closes his eyes and lets Kirishima do whatever the fuck he wants to deal with this disruption to their daily routine and interpret how he will because Katsuki does not want to be alone after that nightmare and Kirishima is the poor bastard who claims BFF status so he's just gonna have to fucking deal with this shit. Katsuki curls up into a ball, pulling the blanket over him without one ounce of regret or hesitation and hears the redhead sputter and move about the room.

It's comforting to hear the dumbass moving about the room like a chicken with its head cut off, shooting off questions like it's his god damn job. Much better than the silence of his own room. Better than the feel of hands moving down his chest and black fingers digging into his skin that always envelops after those nightmares. The sound of someone he trusts moving around the room, talking in a soft voice is incredibly soothing to the pounding of his head.

He trusts Kirishima like he hasn't anyone else. The warm feeling in his chest is wholly different from everything he's been feeling these last few days and he lets the sound of Kirishima freaking out lull him to sleep. No Doctors or Nomu to haunt him this time.

He wonders...

If he'd let Deku get close to him, if he'd let Deku be his friend like the nerd had tried so hard to do over the years, would this have been what it felt like? The cold, empty house he'd spent so many hours and days and weeks in with no one to talk to seemed so much worse in hindsight.

Katsuki remembers how much the idea of leaning on Deku for help or

friendship had horrified him. He was afraid. Afraid that Deku would break like his dad. Afraid he'd spend his whole life being compared to Deku and found lacking. Being the Monster in his own life. Afraid that Deku would get close enough, see what was underneath, and then start avoiding him like his dad tended to do.

Plus Deku was never the type to just... help. He always questioned everything. Always wanted to know more, more, more. That was something Katsuki was never capable or comfortable with. Deku always pushed and Katsuki often times needed to just be. To exist without having to explain himself at every turn. The idea of being Deku's friend had always been so... stressful. Anxiety inducing. Deku had always been... too much.

Maybe he and Deku could never have been friends.

One way or the other, Katsuki would have ended up hurting him. That just seemed to be the nature of their relationship. Even if Katsuki had tried his hardest, like he had with his dad, there was a very real possibility that Deku would have been hurt a hell of a lot worse just from Katsuki being himself.

That's how it always seemed to go.

It was better off this way. This 'sort of friends but more distant' thing they had going on. Knowing each other so well and always being near each other, like brothers, but never quite friends. It was better with Katsuki helping from a distance so when things went tits up, there was something of a wall between them to protect the nerd from the backlash.

Kirishima has stopped talking.

Stopped questioning.

Katsuki curls in against the wall and is not surprised to feel blankets dropped on top of him and a calloused hand touches his forehead. There's a heavy sigh he's distantly aware of, but no protest.

Kirishima never pushes the point.

He wishes he'd known Kirishima back then, but then again, he doubts his friend would have handled the part of Katsuki that had bullied Deku when the nerd refused to leave him be. And Kirishima hadn't been nearly as confident back then so it probably wouldn't have been good.

Katsuki might have ruined Kirishima's childhood too.

He's thinking too much.

Going into the brooding category now. Maybe it's the heat. He aches all over and he's both too hot and too cold. Ah, fuck, he's probably really getting sick. Katsuki breathes through his nose and lets the exhaustion take him as the sounds of Kirishima's worried pacing lulls him into a sense of peace.

A tiny voice in his head snickering as he realizes he can get some sleep and also... revenge. Paybacks a bitch isn't 'Mr. I'll just be taking this door.' Katsuki is too exhausted to come up with anything particularly clever and anyways, it was in the comfort of his own mind so who gave a fuck how corny and unoriginal he sounded?

The blanket smells like sweat and too much body axe (he's made fun of the guy enough for his excessive use of it to instantly recognize the pine/mountain brand the idiot prefers) and there are little sprinklings of red on all the pillows as if Kirishima's hair color had decided to leap from his head to the sheet and for some fucking reason that makes him laugh internally. The obnoxious decor is something he'd cringe at most days, but now its a comfort. Familiar.

For the first time in his life, he has a best friend.

It's odd.

And good.

When he falls asleep, it's deep and full.

Shota rewound the security cameras again, but just like the last fifty times, there was no movement. No sign that there were any problems at all. He'd even increased the sound reception on all available links and no voice recordings had lent to anything outside of some teenage shenanigans he would rather not think about ever again.

"You know, they say insanity is doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result," a familiar voice called.

Higari Maijima walked through the door, his obnoxious metal boots clanking louder than they had any right to. Which meant he was doing it on purpose just to annoy him. Shota grunted, as he pushed away from the computer screen and grabbed the papers instead, the still rather thick list of people's quirks who fit the description of what they were looking for. He'd managed to whittle it down some, but not a substantial amount. Nothing impressive, anyhow.

Powerloader set down a box on his desk that no doubt had Bakugou's jacket. The short redhead sat down at one of the seats next to him and tilted his head in a silent question as he spotted the papers of profile Quirk analysis pages.

"Thank you, this should help out a lot," Shota told him, lifting the lid of the box just enough to view the contents inside, before adding in an impressed tone. "You even made it his style."

Powerloader grinned.

"Yeah, well, I had a fun time designing his costume. Ururaka's too."

It had the signature two dots on the back in red against the mostly black jacket.

"You could have taken the opportunity to put unicorns on it. I'd still have made him wear it," Shota said evenly, not at all bitter about all this extra work or the late nights or lack of sleep.

At his words, Powerloader's grin just got bigger.

"Why don't you take it out and look at the inside of the jacket?" The man urged.

He quirked an eyebrow, putting down his papers and carefully pulling out the winter coat, peaking at the inside... and oh.

"Clever."

"Isn't it?" Powerloader rocked back on his heels, looking far too much like an adolescent despite being older than Shota himself. "Just a little something to get the blood flowing."

"Hopefully he won't blow it up," Shota muttered.

Powerloader waved away the concern.

"Bakugou wouldn't do that... mostly because he'd have to admit what

was inside the jacket.”

“True.”

“Plus this gives me the power to tease him every time I see him,” Powerloader added. Shota huffed, the tech teacher always had three or more reasons for doing something and had never been prone to hiding those ulterior motives. He was never sure whether he should be impressed or wary.

“I was thinking...” Higari started.

Wary. Definitely wary.

“Bakugou’s a really smart kid. I took the liberty of looking at his file,” Higari says casually.

Shota hopes his look is as unimpressed as the irritation he feels.

“No.”

“You haven’t heard my proposal.”

“Katsuki Bakugou is going to be a Pro-hero. You can’t have him.”

Powerloader shrugged. Twirling a screwdriver he’d pulled from seemingly nowhere.

“I have no doubt about that. I was thinking he could benefit from some hands-on mathematics though, it appears as if he is pretty far ahead, maybe even a bit too far ahead. It would make sense to have him transferred to engineering application for mathematics in his second year instead of regular arithmetic. We don’t want him being bored, now do we?”

Shota scowled.

Higari continued, pretending to not know how annoyed he was making the Underground Hero.

“He’s already signed up for Advanced Chemistry next year, what with his quirk being nitroglycerin and all, it’s best to have him know how his sweat might mix with other compounds and elements. It just seems to me that it wouldn’t be too far of a stretch to have him take a few other advanced courses that would better benefit him in the long run.”

“Under your support tech department,” Shota said knowingly.

Not that it was a bad idea. Bakugou was ridiculously smart. It had been such a stressful year for the kid though and Shota didn't want to overload him with hefty subjects on top of everything else. Especially subjects that separated him from his classmates.

Each of his students would be taking one or two of the advanced classes based on their quirk and needs, but he already had been planning to set Bakugou up with more than the standard. Yaoyorozu. Midoriya. Iida. Todoroki. Asui. His top six. He believed in all of his students of course, but these six were a bit... smarter than the rest. They could handle a heavier academic workload without it crushing them underfoot.

"He has an aptitude for engineering," Higari said with a shrug, "having a heavy hitter hero who knows the mechanics of his weapons is invaluable. Easily a top ten hero."

Bakugou had an unnatural aptitude for everything that wasn't social.

Shota rolled his eyes.

"Midoriya I can see charming you, but what did Bakugou do?" Prickly as a cactus and the manners of a starving lioness hunting a three-legged zebra, it was hard to picture someone seeing through the explosive boy's persona to the natural-born genius underneath in such a short time period.

Hell, Best Jeanist had spent a week with the kid and hadn't seemed to be able to see even a hint of what Shota had uncovered. From Bakugou's essay on the internship, it seemed the Pro-Hero had acted as if he knew Bakugou before he even spoke to the kid. His student had begrudgingly touched on the subject of creating a 'positive' image for the public, but the information Best Jeansit had force-fed the kid had been dripping with so much clear distaste and frustration so Shota figures the message had been wholly ignored. He'd even go so far as to say Bakugou would avoid the advice as much as possible in his own career.

Higari wagged a finger at him, pulling out a set of papers and slamming it onto the desk between them.

"He charmed me with dirt."

Shota's eyebrows raised as he picked up the papers.

"These locations aren't all that close," he muttered, flipping through

the pages. Traces of clay in them, covering a very large area of Japan to the north.

“Its what he wanted. He had a pile of dirt and asked me if I could figure out where it came from.”

Shit.

The dirt and grime about the room. There had always been the possibility that Bakugou had brought it into the room somehow. This though... this solidified Shota's suspicions that he had been taken out of his room. Shota chewed on the inside of his cheek. Thinking. It also meant that Bakugou himself didn't know where that place was.

He hadn't considered the possibility that Bakugou didn't know much about what was going on either. It suddenly struck him that Bakugou might be just as in the dark about what was happening to him as Shota himself was.

And clever little shit that he was, Bakugou was putting the pieces together.

There was a sick sort of satisfaction in that. It was a horrible situation. Yes, but somehow, knowing that Bakugou was working towards an answer, fighting just as hard to fix things as Shota was... it was a relief in a way. Some part of him had feared that he was uncovering a family issue here, that Bakugou's silence was an ingrained silence from long term abuse rather than a quirk. He'd feared that Bakugou would fight him once he uncovered the truth or that he would refuse help once things had been unraveled.

He'd feared that Bakugou would defend the villain in this story.

That Bakugou would love the Villain in this story.

Here though, here was solid proof, physical proof, that Bakugou wanted to help himself. It was much less likely to be tied to his family, which was... bad. Awful. There were monsters targetting his student. A student who had already suffered so much, but it was not familiar monsters and for that... for that small mercy, he was thankful.

If Masaru or Mitsuki Bakugou had been the Villains of his story, he wasn't sure how Katsuki would survive that. Not with everything else. He'd hoped that wasn't the case, of course, but that interview they had... it put a few doubts in his head.

A docile, furtive and shy father.

A supportive, though aggressive mother who'd placed the blame for being kidnapped so readily on her son's shoulders. Katsuki had been just as aggressive in that meeting and seemed to go toe to toe with his mother with ease and had not seemed to take the jibe personally. He had in no way flinched away from either of his parents. Which was really the only reason he'd left it at that.

But what if he'd been wrong?

That thought had plagued him since the moment Bakugou had started acting worn down. The fight with Midoriya, Bakugou blaming himself for All Might's retirement, well wasn't that a bit too close to what his mother had said?

And while all the other students loved to visit their parents on weekends, Bakugou had only gone back once in the months since moving into the dorms. One time. That had sent apprehension through him.

Their files were on his desk right at this moment. All part of the investigation he'd been putting into his student. Each bit he seemed to uncover left a bad taste in his mouth, but none of it was pointing towards foul play and definitely nothing to do with what was currently going on.

Even having a better idea that this didn't have anything to do with Bakugou's parents didn't help him to figure out exactly what the hell was going on. The locations though... that was a good place to start. He wondered how far Bakugou himself had gotten. Though asking the kid was clearly not going to help at all. Especially if he'd been silenced as Shota suspected. It would be annoying to waste time on places that Bakugou might have already eliminated, but there was hardly anything he could do about that at the moment.

If only he could...

There was a tap against his head.

"Earth to Eraserhead, come in, the aliens have impregnated half the student body and we need reinforcements," Higari spoke, making a fake radio noise.

"How old are you again?" Shota muttered, taking a sip of his coffee.

“49 and a half.”

He choked on his drink at that.

Denki frowned, his eyes meeting Sero's own concerned gaze as they spotted Bakugou doing it *again*. ‘It’ being tugging absently at his hair. It wasn't in the cute way Yaoyorozu played with her hair while she studied or Jiro's admittedly adorable habit of twirling her earphones while she took notes.

No.

Bakugou's fingers were tugging in an aggressive, stressed-out way, strands of ash blonde hair coming loose every few minutes, collecting like a foreboding storm for a ship on his lap and bed, only this storm was made up of aggression and silence instead of thunder and lightning. Bakugou stared down blankly at the homework they'd brought him. The bowl of soup had been blatantly ignored, placed on his bedside dresser with barely a glance even though Denki was pretty sure it was the first food Bakugou had seen since yesterday.

He was reminded of what Aizawa had told them; that Bakugou had already passed out this week from *not eating*.

“What area of this shit are you guys struggling with?” Bakugou finally demanded as he finished leafing through the papers.

Sero huffed, his concern turning into an eye-roll.

“We're not struggling with anything. We're dropping homework off.”

Bakugou leveled them with an unimpressed glare.

“Then why are you still here?” Bakugou grouched.

“Because in case you've forgotten...” Sero said dryly, gesturing towards the bowl of soup, “the assignments this week is on Nutrition because someone hasn't been taking care of themselves.”

Boy was he glad Sero had said it so Denki didn't have to. The

menacing if half-hearted glare thrown their way was mostly at Sero. Still, Bakugou dropped the packet and reached for the soup, overemphasizing taking a bite.

Denki braved flopping onto the bed, watching as the soup sloshed threateningly close to the edge and Bakugou's scowl was turned on him. He grinned, nudging him playfully, feeling Bakugou tense up next to him at the contact.

He didn't say anything though. Staring fixedly at his own soup, he didn't complain about the contact or fight it. Denki almost wanted to do a double thumbs up or give Sero a victory high five. But Bakugou was too much like a rabbit in these moments. Any sudden movements and the jackass would startle, only instead of running off like a normal socially awkward afraid of interacting with people teenager Bakugou would puff up like an indignant hen and violently remove them from his territory. Part rabbit, part rabies infested wolverine.

How had he become this guy's friend?

"So you idiots understand all this nutrition shit then, not stuck on anything...?"

Oh yeah. That was why. Because underneath the rabbit and rabies and wolverine was a guy who really did care about them and their success and happiness. Layered as it was under slurs and grouchiness.

"Yeah, yeah, we got it down," Sero said in exasperation. "I'm pretty sure I know more about this stuff than you do."

"Yeah?" Bakugou growled. "Then where are your fucking muscles Skeletor? Why do you have fucking chicken legs if you're such an expert on nutrition? Bugging me about my eating habits when a wind could blow you over is fucking hypocritical, don't you think?"

Denki covered his mouth, choking on his laughter as Sero's face took on a look of great offense. Arms crossing and the usually too large smile twisting downwards.

"I focus on my core!" Sero protested. "I've got abs for miles."

"You need to focus on your weaknesses," Bakugou snapped back. "Not your strengths."

"Ohhhhhh," Denki murmured, "did you hear that Sero? Bakugou just admitted he thinks your core is your strength. He thinks your

sexxxxxxy, he likes your coooooore, he... gah!"

Bakugou's hand was suddenly pinning his face to the bed. A small part of him had to admire that he had yet to spill even a drop of the soup in his other hand.

"And YOU, you've got a quirk that could easily put you in the top five if you stopped half-assing everything! Stop playing your fucking video games and wasting your fucking time on mindless shit and pay attention!"

"I feel personally attacked," Denki muttered into the mattress.

"Tch. Because I'm personally attacking you, dunceface."

"Another rousing motivational speech from the Beast of 1A," Sero muttered in exasperation.

"I wouldn't need to give so many if you fuckwits actually listened to my god damn words."

"Can I listen to your words sitting up?" Denki asked.

Bakugou let go of him, setting down his soup at the same time.

"You come back to class tomorrow, right?" Sero asked as he stood and stretched.

"Oh yeah," Denki said excitedly. "Right on time for our last hero training session over the weekend. Aizawa hasn't said anything, but All Might's a sucker and told us we're going to be doing another group exercise. And get this, get this..."

Pure gold.

"We're finally going to be seeing Mr. Grumpy Kacchan up after eight-o'clock," Denki delivered the bomb with a grin, watching as Bakugou stiffened up and whipped his head around. Staring at Denki with a sharp-eyed glare.

"What?"

"It's a night training session," Sero said, much more gently than Denki. "All Might mentioned how most of the worst type of crimes take place in the middle of the night so for our final project of the semester we're getting a crash course on fighting in the dark."

“How late are we talking?” Bakugou growled out, he looked... intense. Like they were on the battlefield and he was being held back.

“All Might just said to be prepared to be working until sunrise,” Denki said with a shrug.

“You okay Blasty?” Sero asked.

It was a fair question. Bakugou’s ridiculous arm muscles were bulging as he wrung his hands together in his lap. His face had that carefully blank look to it that it had taken on when he’d gone silent for weeks. And then his right hand went up and tugged lightly at his hair. The agitation returning. A habit born out of stress, Denki realized. An odd concept to associate with Bakugou’s ‘give-no-shits’ persona.

Denki’s hand shot forward before he could think better at it, tightly grasping onto his friend’s wrist. He felt the muscles pulled tight under his fingers. The slick, hot sweat covering him.

“Hey, hey now, let’s not do that,” Denki whispered. He pulled lightly at the wrist, but it was like trying to move stone. “Come on now, you don’t want to be known as Bald Blasty, do you?”

“Or Crackhead Crackles,” Sero pointed out.

“Loose strands Lunatic,” Denki piped up.

“Cancer crown!”

“Oh dude, no, that’s not okay.”

“You two are unbelievably fucking stupid,” Bakugou said quietly, but the hand dropped. Denki squeezed Bakugou’s wrist gently before letting it go.

“We only do it for your love,” Denki announced, “love is the only thing in this world that can make fools of us all.”

“Is this stupidity contagious?” Bakugou asked, eyeing them warily.

Denki noticed though, that his body had relaxed. Bakugou no longer looked panicked.

“Only if you truly fall in love with us,” Denki said, throwing his arm around Sero.

“Which means your doomed because my core is sexy!” Sero threw his

arms over his head and jutting out in a manner imitating Aoyama.

Bakugou threw a pillow at the two of them, managing to hit both in the face with the same projectile.

“Get out you losers! Before I kill you!”

Denki laughed, pulling Sero with him as he ran for the door.

“Glad to see you’re feeling better!” Sero called.

“Eat your soup, Explodo-Kill!” Denki yelled out behind him.

It shouldn’t be possible to hit someone in the head with dice from that far away but Katsuki Bakugou managed it just fine.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter we have Night Training: Bakugou's attempts to get out of night training are thwarted as Aizawa pushes for answers.

Chapter 14: Not a Good Guy

Chapter Summary

Plans are being put in motion and Katsuki's at the end of his ropes

Chapter 14: Not a Good Guy

“Oh, I guess we’re finally gonna be able to see Bakugou past his bedtime.”

“Watch out guys, if you think he’s cranky during the day, he’s a straight-up beast passed sundown.”

“We finally get a night time hang out with Blasty!”

“Try not to blow up the field while you’re out there.”

Katsuki glares with all of his usual ferocity at his classmates. Getting through the day is a struggle. Every second passing by reminding him that midnight was approaching. His mind constantly going towards what he should do to avoid this shit. When the afternoon finally arrives, Aizawa dismisses them to get some rest before the long night ahead of them.

“You okay?” Kirishima asks as he pulls up next to him.

Katsuki gives a short, sharp nod rather than reply.

“Can I ask why you get so tense about being up at night?” Kirishima pushes.

“You just did.”

He doesn't say anything else, leaving the redhead in awkward silence. He doesn't normally shut Kirishima out so indefinitely and it's clear his best friend doesn't know how to handle it. The red head's rubbing at the back of his neck, eyes scanning the horizons as he tries to find the right words. So Katsuki shuts him down further.

“And no, you can't.”

Kirishima looks at him then, eyes searching his, brows knit and head tilted. He's analyzing Katsuki and it irritates him that shitty hair is usually pretty accurate.

“Bro... you're really tense. Seriously, you know you can tell me. I won't judge you.”

‘I know that you idiot,’ he wants to say. The words stick in his throat though. He wonders, not for the first time if it's a mistake to get so close. He wonders if its mean of him to try to be friends with these people. To pull them close and then push them away over and over again. It leaves a nasty taste in the back of his throat that lingers no matter how much mouth wash he uses.

It's not like Bakugou can start over again.

He's already close to them. He's already invested in these idiots. It's not a question of whether he should because he is. They are his friends. They are close to him. Distancing himself now sounds like he's preparing for suicide or some shit like that. Makes him sound weak. His own selfishness and guilt war with the practical side, the fierce side that says this isn't over yet.

“...kugou?”

He looks up to see Kirishima has morphed from ‘slightly concerned friend’ to full-blown alarm. Such a fucking mother hen. And then hardened hands are grabbing at his wrist and he realizes that he's tugging at his hair... again. Strands fall to the ground between them and Katsuki stares dully down at it as Kirishima's eyes go impossibly wide and he has yet to let go of him.

“I...” Katsuki has the inklings of an idea. He hates it, acting like a beaten dog with its tail between its legs, but it might just be his only chance. “... haven't really felt good all day. I don't think I'm completely back to 100% percent. I'm going to go lie down.”

Kirishima's alarm turns to concern, with a touch of suspicion in his features.

"That sucks man, you need me to bring you anything?"

"I've got water bottles upstairs. I should be good."

"Alright..."

That sound of disbelief. He really was such a shitty liar. The hardened hand softens to skin, an odd sensation Katsuki isn't use to. He wants to reach out and grab Kirishima's shoulder, more to steady himself than anything, but the idea is stupid so he dismisses it. The weak thoughts won't help him any. He should get some sleep. Get out of his own head.

He turns and leaves.

"Hey Kacchan?"

"What?"

Katsuki winced as he spotted his dad giving him a 'look' from the corner of his eye that said 'be nicer.' He sighs through his nose and looks at Izuku whose frowning down at the carpet.

"Spit it out," Katsuki tells him, gently.

He hears his dad sigh and knows he failed at the 'gentle' part of it. It's annoying that he can't seem to ever get that right. Izuku looks up at him furtively, before focusing back on his Golden Age All Might figurine.

"Do you think... I could be a hero... even though I'm quirkless?"

Katsuki pursed his lips as he stared down at All Might too. For a moment he thinks he might lie. He's always making Izuku cry and he was definitely going to cry if Katsuki was honest, but the idea of pretending made him feel sick. Like how some of their teachers pretended to like Katsuki and said nice things to his face only to

whisper nasty things to each other like he couldn't hear them.

No.

Katsuki hated that and he hated the idea of lying to Izuku. Though Izuku was starting to get that same twist to his mouth adults had. The one that said he didn't like what Katsuki was saying even though Izuku was agreeing with him or going along with what they were all doing. There was this look in Izuku's eyes that said he was upset with Katsuki, but he wouldn't say why.

Katsuki hated that too.

More and more lately, it felt like people wanted him to pretend to be someone else. He wasn't sure who that someone was or how to go about being them, but it always felt awful when he tried. He wasn't sure if that was because he always failed or because being himself seemed to be a bad thing.

"Obviously you can't be a hero," Katsuki finally decides on the truth. He can hear the sharp intake of breath his dad makes. The hitch in Izuku's breathing. He keeps going though. "You *can* help heroes though. There's lots of jobs people with useless quirks have that help out heroes and you're great at being helpful so you can be one of those people."

Izuku is biting his lip and his eyes are wet and too big. He looks hurt and Katsuki feels bad about that but ignoring the truth just because it hurts isn't good. It's how his dad got so sick, because he ignored early signs. Izuku needed to face the truth before he ends up hurting himself or someone else and...

...and there goes the waterworks.

His dad sends him a look that's part disapproval, part exasperation. Gently bending down and carefully taking Izuku in his arms and rocking him back and forth, rubbing his back and all those soothing things that Katsuki didn't need because he wasn't a baby. He sends them both an annoyed glance.

Great.

Now he was going to be blamed for this.

He stared down at the All Might toy, picking it up and running his hand over the uniform. All Might would understand. He was strong

and brave and always faced things head on. None of this useless lying or pretending to be something he wasn't. He...

"And why would I do that?" Katsuki drops the toy, taking several steps back as the thing's head turns. Too big smile still in place. "You are the reason I am no longer a hero. Why would I support you destroying someone else's life?"

"What?"

There's something hot sliding down his own face now and... no. Katsuki doesn't cry. He isn't Izuku. He isn't his dad. He's not like them.

"And what are you like?" Toy All Might demands as if capable of not only speech but mind reading. "Aggressive? Violent? *Villainous*?"

"No! No, I'm..." Katsuki swallows, looking around for Izuku or his dad. "I'm just honest! I don't lie!" He tries to defend himself. "I'm a hero!"

"Despite not having any heroic traits?" The All Might Toy tilts its head, the plastic smile turning downwards into a frown. "You are not kind or compassionate or understanding. You don't consider other people's feelings or care about helping the weak. All you want to do is fight and win. You can't even hold a conversation with another person without making them cry."

"That's not true..." He hiccups, scrubbing at his eyes.

But wasn't it? He was always trying to be nice but his words always came out so wrong. Everyone was always so angry with him but when he tried to just... not talk at all they got angry about that too. More and more lately he'd been wondering if he should just... give up.

"People," a dark voice spoke behind him.

Katsuki whirled around to see an impossibly tall person in a suit walk out of the shadows. Face a disgusting mess of scars and burned flesh. A mouth of white, straight teeth the only part left not disfigured.

"The only thing in this world you've ever giving up on is trying to communicate with people," the monster said conversationally. "That's why you stopped being friends with Izuku, no? Because you hated feeling like the bad guy every time you two spoke. You hated that no matter how hard you tried to be gentle that you always seemed to

make him cry.”

“Izuku’s my best friend,” Katsuki protested. “I wouldn’t stop being friends with him!”

A trickle of a memory came back to him.

He had though. He wasn’t a little kid anymore... was he? He’d pushed Izuku awa... No. He’d pushed Deku away, as hard as he could. But the idiot kept trying so hard to still be friends with him. He kept clinging, following, shouting after Katsuki no matter how much Katsuki tried to make him go away. Deku didn’t get it. That it was better for everyone if Deku just left it be. Left Katsuki alone. Stopped bothering Katsuki with his higher ground bullshit and condescending niceness and pushing the fact that he was so much better with people than Katsuki was in his fucking face all the time.

Because...

“Because its better if you’re alone, right? If people want to see the worst in you even when you are trying your best, then let them.” The dark figure said slowly, voice coated in amusement.

It all came rushing back.

Deku.

All Might.

The League of Villains.

Class 1A.

“All For One,” he said darkly, straightening his back. His family home vanished, but the All Might Toy remained, still frowning at him. He was sixteen. Not six. He was a hero. Not a villain.

“Are you so certain?” All For One spoke silkily. Not at all in a hurry. “Heroes and Villains are made from the same cloth, after all.” The man was quoting Best Jeanist, the number 4 heroes words having echoed inside of Katsuki’s skull over and over again for months. “It doesn’t matter that you follow all the rules, that you are a 4.0 G.P.A student, that you listen to the teachers instructions to a T... you are still considered ‘the bad boy’ of UA.”

Words from the Pro-hero Slidin’ Go after he and Todoroki had taken

out the wallet thieves not so long ago. Katsuki doesn't take a step back when All For One moves forward. He stands his ground as the monstrosity towers over him.

"Haven't you already decided that you would be yourself? Even if the world hated you?" All For One purrs. "Even if your father hated you?"

Katsuki flinches at that.

"Sore spot?" All For One asks lightly. "What about Kirishima? Kaminari? Ashido? Sero? Would you be so complacent if they were the ones who hated you? We're watching you, Katsuki. We know. You've been trying again."

"You don't know shit."

The mouth grins, stretching so wide, the burned flesh wrinkles.

"Do you think anyone can tell the difference?" The whisper is soft, a ragged voice Katsuki is familiar with. Out of the shadows, Shigaraki steps forward, the hands freak scratches at his neck, head tilted as if he were observing Katsuki. "Do you think any of them knows when you are trying to be nice? No one has ever been able to tell the difference before. Not Deku. Not your father. All your efforts to be a good person have always been in vain, so what difference does it make?"

The Magician with the compressor quirk steps out, white mask completely blank as he bows to All For One and Hands-Freak.

"I thought you said you do what you want and never anything else?" The soft playful tone demands. "Yet here you are, acting the entertainer even though you couldn't pretend in front of us to save your own skin. Not an actor, you said, yet here you are, trying to show kindness and compassion. What a farce."

"Don't discourage him, Sako," The Doctor steps out of the shadows. "We want him to play the part of the innocent U.A student, after all."

"I've told you before," Katsuki hisses. "I won't help you. Even if you torture me... kill me, I won't aide you in any way."

Shadows are surrounding him now. He recognizes them as the others. As the assistant and the League- Twice, the blood lust girl, Dabi, the lizard freak with the Stain obsession. As the Nomu [the black 'elite' Nomu and the regular ones]. The female Nomu with the long limbs.

He feels his breath hitch as he's boxed in on all sides.

"Did you think it would be so simple?" The Doctor demands. "That a simple 'no' would be the end of it?" The chuckle is loud and leering. Fingers reach out and Katsuki slaps the hand away, stepping backward until hands are on his back. Scales and nails and claws, digging into his skin, holding him rigidly in place. "Does anything about me scream something so straight forward?"

Hands clamp down around his wrists. Katsuki's breathing is too fast as he tugs and pulls to no use. His eyes fall to the floor where the damned toy still lays, frowning up at him. The plastic eyes are glaring now.

"How could I have ever thought you could work with Izuku?" All Might's voice comes out sad. "That you two could stand by each other and support one another? What a joke."

The limbs start to drag him backward, towards the shadows.

"No... I..." Katsuki swallows. "I'm fighting! I'm fighting them!"

"That's all you ever do. Fight." All Might says sadly. "Didn't I tell you that you need more than that? You need the compassion to save people too. You clearly lack that."

"I've been trying..." Katsuki yells... no. The voice comes out too quiet. It comes out choked and small. "I've been..."

"Yet you can't even save yourself."

The words are like an ax.

Katsuki goes quiet.

More hands clamp down on him. All For One. The Doctor's. The Assistant. The Nomu. He feels them pulling him back.

"I'm trying," Katsuki whispers. "But I don't know what to do."

"Isn't that always the case?" All Might's voice demands from far away now. "It doesn't matter how much effort you put in if you never succeed."

He feels the tears again, hot and steady.

The light is fading.

“You aren’t a good person, Bakugou, my boy, we all know that. You’ll never be able to escape the Villains because you aren’t good enough to escape them; not as a hero. You’ll die being the student with the most potential to be a Villain. The one I tried to save but failed to. Because no one can save you from yourself.”

The voice faded.

The darkness overtook him.

The scream in his throat comes out as a garbled cough. He strains to breathe as the covers feel as if they are trying to strangle him. He sits up with difficulty and covers his face with his hands. A nightmare.

Just another fucking nightmare.

Sweat covers him from head to toe, making the shirt stick to his skin in hot patches. He pulls it off and almost falls out of bed as he untangles his limbs from the mess of his bed. He downs a bottle of water as he tries to calm himself.

None of it was true.

All Might would never say those things. The villains weren’t here. He rubs his face, his fingertips coming away with more sweat. He feels gross. Too hot yet oddly cold inside. Empty. Too much fucking emotions lately. Too much of everything.

He takes a shower but still feels filthy.

At sundown, when he still hasn’t emerged, Aizawa comes for him.

“Bakugou.”

His name is said so simply and with such expectation. Katsuki hates it. He unwillingly pulls himself from the bed and answers the door, though he can’t quite meet his teacher's eyes.

“You want to tell me why you’re here and not with the others, ready to go?”

Aizawa's eyes look more agitated than normal. Red bleeding into the white of his eyes when they normally just look strained.

"Not feeling well," he grunted out, hoping his teacher would accept the answer and leave him too it. Katsuki didn't call out. Not for any reason. Surely, surely the teacher would be willing to bend for this...

"Yeah... I don't believe you."

Katsuki stiffened.

"So you were fine with being out at night at the camp, but now you're not?" Aizawa asked, speaking slowly, sounding as if he were talking more to himself than Katsuki. Like he was trying to figure him out.

"I give my word, Bakugou, I will do everything in my power to stop whatever is going on, but I need to know. I need you to tell me."

It's an odd mix. Katsuki trusts Aizawa, but he also feels as if Aizawa is hunting him.

Katsuki doesn't fidget, but it's a close thing. He's leaning hard enough into the frame of the door that it actually hurts. Aizawa isn't wrong. He's unnervingly intelligent and Katsuki wishes it was Present Mic or All Might here instead. It was easy to distract Mic and All Might. To make them fold to his wishes if he put enough pressure into the pitch.

Aizawa was like a living bullshit detector.

"Have you been out at night at all since it happened?" Aizawa asks softly eyes intent before the man snorted in realization. "Yes, you have, I believe you fought Modoriya in the middle of the night. So what is this?"

His fight with Midoriya had been early though. Long before midnight. His hands clench at his sides as he tries to come up with a good reason that his teacher will accept, but he's blanking.

"I just... fuck, I feel like shit, okay?"

"And what will your excuse be next time?" Aizawa demands. "You can't avoid working at night. You have to know how to work at night. So you can either tell me what's going on or you can come with me."

“No.”

Aizawa turns to him, eyes narrowed.

“No, you can’t tell me or no you aren’t coming? Be specific, Bakugou.”

His mind is still blank. He’s been trying to come up with excuses all day, but there is nothing that makes sense. Aizawa is looking him up and down, his arms folded and expression tired. But the sharp edge is still there. Analyzing his every minuscule movement. Katsuki tastes ash in his mouth again. He’s filled with a sudden urge to never speak again. He *needs* to stop talking, to stop moving, to stop breathing.

“Even Tokoyami is out and ready and he loses control of his quirk at night. He is the one who should be trying this stunt with me, but he’s not. So why are you?”

Ash burns his throat. He’s surprised it hasn’t poured out of his mouth yet. Has he given himself away? Is she killing him? Is slow suffocation how she kills him? There’s an urge inside of him that feels unnatural, a need to fix a mistake consuming his thoughts.

“Can’t you just trust me?!” Katsuki snaps. He’s breathing harder now. He’s trying to keep the panic at bay, but he can’t go. He can’t. Hands are on his shoulders and Aizawa is looking at him in startlement.

“Trust is two folds, Bakugou, I need you to work with me here.”

Frustration bubbles up in his chest.

“Fuck,” he wheezes out.

The word physically pains him to say. There’s a burning cord around his neck though. A dark force and suicide on his tongue, in his muscle movements, the twist of his lips. She’s going to kill him. He’s going to die right here in front of Aizawa because he’s too fucking stupid to figure out how to get out of this trap he’s in.

Aizawa’s hands are still on his shoulders. The man is searching him for answers. Bakugou stares back in rigid pain. Ash like death torching his insides as they stand off against one another. It feels almost as if that bitch is here, her breath against his ear, chin on his shoulder, waiting for him to make a move.

Bakugou doesn’t make the first move though.

“Then I’m sorry, but I still expect you to complete the exercise. If you can’t give me a reasonable excuse, then you will be participating tonight.”

Then Aizawa lets go.

He pulls out Katsuki’s briefcase with his uniform in it. The winter one. The one that covers his arms and his hands and that stretches over his neck. No one will see his hands or arms spreading with cancer when it happens. He’ll just drop.

If he makes it that far.

The cord doesn’t tighten further, but he feels the threat of it. Feels the faint traces of a breath on the back of his neck. Maybe it’s the paranoia settling in like a life of its own. Maybe Katsuki’s finally losing his mind over this shit. Cracked. Descended into madness. Blew the fucking marbles in his head to smithereens.

But he doesn’t want to take the chance.

He bends down slowly and takes the case.

“Give me a minute,” he says quietly, in defeat.

The cord loosens and the ash is smothered out, leaving only the feel of coals along his throat and the pit of his stomach. The feeling of someone standing behind him fades but doesn’t quite disappear. Lingered like a shadow, less substantial than Dark Shadow, but present none the less. He almost fucked up and now he’s being stalked for it.

Crap.

Aizawa is watching him with narrowed eyes. Calculating. Katsuki closes the door in his face with no guilt at all. The separation is enough to realize his heart feels like it’s making a spectacular escape attempt against his chest cavity. Shit. He rubs at his chest, wondering if what just happened damaged him in some way.

He doesn’t have time to think. He grabs his mouth guard, headphones, and iPod. Fuck all if he’s getting trapped at the USJ with this shit and nothing to distract himself. He’s riding this miserable clusterfuck out with his standby comforts. He tucks them away in a pocket, chugging a bottle of water since he won’t be able to have it later. He looks around the room. Part of him wants to take a bag if he’s going to get

stuck out there all night to the ass crack of dawn withering on the ground, but it would look suspicious.

Not that Aizawa's suspicion radar wasn't already at MAC 10 at all hours of the day.

He'll just have to suck it up.

When he steps outside his door in his costume, Aizawa is holding out a jacket that matches. The familiar orange X stretching across black with green lining. There's a fitted hood atop and a facemask in orange. Katsuki takes it silently. Admiring the effort to, not just make it, but make it his.

"We'll have to go outside to the bus so make sure you are wearing that the whole time," Aizawa tells him sternly. "Do not take it off until we are fully inside the USJ. I don't want you to get sick again."

Katsuki hums half-heartedly, opening the coat to slip it on, before spotting the inside of the coat. It was lined with themed skulls. He blinked at how... familiar they... what the fuck is that?!

Bristling, he looks up at Aizawa, gesturing angrily at the jacket. An angry noise comes out of his throat that could be a growl or could be something dying. Aizawa stares back stoically.

Inside the coat there are a variety of themed skulls all made in the image of his classmate's hero costumes. The most notable, largest skull, sitting directly in the center of the fucking jacket, was surrounded by green lightning and distinct freckles across the white bone.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Katsuki hissed.

Aizawa shrugs, tilting more than turning as he heads towards downstairs.

"Wasn't my idea. Apparently, All Might's been gushing about your 'cute' rivalry with the problem child to Powerloader. You are required to wear it, by the way, if you destroy it, you'll spend all of next semester on house arrest."

Might be worth it.

Katsuki pulls the jacket on, hiding the skulls from view before angrily grabbing his grenade bracers and stomping after the man.

Nezu stands in his chair. Eyes intent on the screens monitoring the USJ districts. The majority of screens watch Bakugou's group though. The training session will start in a few minutes and there's a tension in the room that hasn't permeated their group in months. Not since Bakugou was kidnapped.

Eraserhead walks in.

Nezu's tail twitched in agitation. His thoughts straying to Aizawa's words three afternoons ago in the staff meeting. He feels as if he's been... outmaneuvered. Something that hasn't happened since he'd been locked up in a cage with humans poking and prodding him. It leaves a rather bitter taste in his mouth. Beside him Recovery Girl's eyes are so narrowed, they appear closed, though he knows better and knows she's watching.

"Are you certain this is the best way?" Aizawa demands, his movements are stiff, his disapproval apparent. "Bakugou was almost sick with stress at the idea of going out tonight. I'd say borderline terrified."

The man's words cause a quiet murmur to go through the group. Toshinori looks especially tense. Angry. Like he's moments away from leaping out of the room to wrap Bakugou in a hug.

"We know too little of what is going on," Nezu said slowly. "Gathering our various observations together provided little on the extent of the situation. Putting together this 'night training' is the best means of seeing what exactly is going on without forcing Bakugou to speak on it. This... insistence Bakugou has to barricade himself at night, the inability to speak on the matter, the clear meticulous nature this villain is going through to cause harm to Bakugou's mental and physical health while keeping suspicion to a minimal... perhaps it is not kind to stress the situation as we are, but it is the only means of discovering more information so that we might break him free."

Aizawa nodded, though he looked unhappy.

"Did you try your quirk on him, as I asked you to?" Nezu demanded,

eyes never leaving the screen.

“Whatever quirk this is, it isn’t an emitter type. It’s somehow an extension of their physical body which means...”

“That they have caused some form of physical change to Bakugou himself. And considering it appears as if Bakugou is trying to figure it out as much as we are... it was done without his knowledge. Considering the amount of surveillance we’ve had over him, it brings the possibilities of exposure to this type of a villain after the dorms were built to almost zero, meaning it was more than likely done while he was unconscious with the League,” Nezu finished, sighing warily. He could feel the tickle at the back of his skull, the sign that his High Specs Quirk was in full swing.

To go so long without them noticing.

Snipe cleared his throat loudly.

“So... does that mean it’s a League member we’re dealing with here? I won’t be surprised, o’ course, but shouldn’t we be notifying them police investigators, getting them involved. What about that truth quirk guy, Toshinori’s friend,” Snipe tilted his head towards All Might.

“Naomasa’s quirk would be disastrous here,” Toshinori spoke up. “Clearly Bakugou is being kept silent by a quirk and either he cannot speak on the matter because he is being physically stopped or the consequences FOR speaking are terrible and forcing him to speak the truth would harm him.”

“Right,” Snipe murmured.

“Bakugou cannot respond in any physical way, verbal or with hand gestures,” Nezu said slowly, “that is what you picked up on, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Aizawa confirmed.

“And it seems that his intent is connected in this as well,” Nezu muttered to himself.

“How do ya figure that?” Sniped asked.

“Midnight said that he destroyed papers she was about to look at, which means the creation of the information isn’t harmful, but the intention of someone seeing it is. Which means that if Bakugou himself knows we are seeing information then it is likely this Villain

does too.”

Toshinori stepped forward, looking ashen.

“So Bakugou has to be kept in the dark then?”

Nezu nodded.

“Unfortunately, we must act as if we have not put this information together in order to protect Bakugou from whatever Villain is stalking him. Yes.”

“That means,” Aizawa said in frustration, “that the League of Villains has a number of associates still unidentified yet.”

“As we suspected,” Nezu said dismissively. “Two weeks ago, during the last Nomu attack, Dabi was reported using the same transportation quirk that we first assumed was All for One’s. Which means whoever is the true user of the tar transportation quirk is still at large and its entirely possibly that it is the suspected transportation from Bakugou’s room, what with the only signs of travel being the dirt. Which means Bakugou’s been linked in some way to the user, possibly in the same way he’s been physically changed by the Silencer. The question is though, do these people need to be within a certain distance of the school or is there some long-distance compensation going on?”

“So you’re testing that with this session?” Toshinori asked.

“I am testing everything.”

If nothing happened to Bakugou tonight, then that would answer just as many questions if something did. It would also raise more questions, but Nezu would get there in all due time. Though that was part of the problem, wasn’t it? Time.

Eraserhead’s quirk didn’t work against this.

Recovery Girl hadn’t detected anything when she’d examined him.

No one, not teachers or students, had noticed any out of character actions until recently despite months having passed.

Nezu’s tail twitched as he considered every angle. He’d known all along that All for One was a nasty piece of work. A man whose age predated quirks altogether. A standard generation for human life was 31.7 and there had been 8 generations of One for All users. The two

brothers had been middle age when quirks first developed, predating the arrival of quirks then by a number of years. Nine generations, if he added on young Midoriya. So quirks started to show up 285 years ago with All for One already a middle-aged man, making the Villain over 300 years old.

Which made this a battle of wits versus experience. High Specs intelligence against a time frame of experience Nezu could not even begin to comprehend even with his quirk. The number of people the man must have implanted into society. The number of businesses, politicians, police officers, heroes, he must have under his thumb. It was no wonder that even as a deformed monstrosity pinned down on all sides by weapons and restraints, the man still spoke and acted with absolute confidence.

It was as if they were playing chess and the man had been allowed to make fifteen moves before anyone else even got to set up their side of the board. And Katsuki Bakugou was simply his latest piece on the board. An unwilling participant.

Across the screens the students fell into position.

Chapter 15: Rot

Chapter 15: Rot

Katsuki, fists raised, slammed down onto the robot. It sputtered, one side of it exploding outwards as he leaped off and rolled, immediately moving towards the next machine. It keened as he hit it, arms awkwardly swiping at him as one of its legs ricochet off the mountain side. The last one moved faster, more agile in its mechanical joints, leaping into the air with its red eye zeroing on him.

He braced his wrist.

A huge explosion ripped through the air, an almost indignant huff from the robot before it was completely blown to pieces. Breathing hard, he glanced over at his team, running up to him, wary looks on their faces.

“While I fully endorse your passion, Bakugou, there’s no need to wear yourself out so thoroughly so early on in this!” Iida came to a sliding stop. “We are going to be out here all night...”

“Not if we finish our task sooner,” Katsuki snapped, wiping sweat from his brow. He had to physically stop himself from leaning on his knees. “We were told we have until sunrise, not that we have to be here until sunrise. We finish this task and then we get the fuck out of here.”

“Listen,” Sero said carefully, stopping between the two of them. “There’s no way we’re finishing this all in one go. Aizawa even told us we were going to have to stop and rest and that delegating that time between us is part of the training. Rushing all of this along is just going to make this a sloppy...”

“I don’t give a fuck what was said. This team is built from some of the fastest members of our class. We can beat the god damn record and show those losers how it’s done right.”

Iida made a noise of disapproval deep in his throat.

“I think you’re forgetting someone.”

Katsuki let out a series of expletives as he glanced at the last member

of their team. Koda was waving half heartedly at them from half a mile down the road, hands on his knees. There were a few animals at his feet chittering up at him, but it was too dark to see what sort of animals they were. The moonlight only did so much, being half full, but even from here he could tell that the strain of Katsuki's pace was quickly doing him in.

Crap.

He bit down on his thumb as he eyed their quiet classmate, aggravation quickly bubbling to the surface. This wouldn't do. He couldn't fucking wait for the guy to pull his shit together. This is what happens when physical training is neglected. Fucking training his god damn vocal cords... shy motherfucker needed to get over that shit if he wanted to be a hero.

Katsuki looked ahead, coming to a decision.

"Four-eyes..."

"Must you?" Iida demanded in exasperation.

Katsuki ignored him.

"You and I will clear the way. Sero, there's a fuck ton of trees and ledges out here, think you can travel with Koda through this?"

He levels the taller boy with a hard look, trying to get across how important this was without saying anything.

"I can..." Sero said slowly, watching Katsuki carefully, his eyes trailing to Iida in unhappiness. Fucker obviously wanted to interrogate him but knew Katsuki wouldn't say anything with their classmates here. Not like Katsuki could even if Sero got him alone. "That might get us to our target faster, but if we rush we might just miss it. Aizawa said it was a hidden entrance."

"I'll do an aerial search when we get closer. Four-eyes is fast enough to do sweeps across the area as I'm taking out the tanks. Koda!" Katsuki snapped. Koda threw his arms up defensively as he approached, looking fit to drop. A look of panic crossing his face as more and more animals gathered around him. "Get those fuckers to scout the area for us. Every nook and cranny. Finding this place is going to be only part of the battle. My guess is that there's some asshat means involved in getting the god damn door open that's going to take us a shit ton of time to crack."

Koda shook his head violently in agreement, his knees looking to give out as he bent over his little fucking friends to talk to them.

“While I don’t mind you taking charge, you could stand to be a little nicer about it,” Iida told him. “And isn’t this supposed to be about stealth?!”

“We might lose a few points for going in guns blazing, but it will be worth it to come away with the fastest record,” Katsuki dismissed. *‘Preferably before Midnight.’* “Enough wasting time, let’s move out!”

“Strategizing is not a was...!”

Katsuki blasted off, feeling his limbs shake with exhaustion as he did. He ignored it. The propulsion sending him forwards along their GPS coordinates. The only help Sensei had given them and honestly, he was suspicious at best of the marker’s location. Shady lying asshole couldn’t be trusted. Three weeks ago the man had given an hour long lecture on dealings in false information and he was ready for this shit to blow up in their faces as a case and point.

There was something about this exercise... a feeling he had. Like he was falling into a trap. Like Deku asking to spar with him. It was never just a spar. There was always a lecture or a request or some shitty reason for Deku. It was never just something as straight forward as beating the shit out of each other or working on a move. Noooo, oh no, that would be too simple. And Deku hated making things simple. Always had to ruin the recipe with a good dose of stupidity or angst.

Robot.

Katsuki dropped his explosions, letting himself fall out of the sky to land on the thing’s camera. The lens cracked. Its arms tried to grab at him but they were nowhere near the Nomu’s level and back flipping away from its reach was child’s play. Katsuki shot out a series of AP shots, blowing holes in the armor before shoving his fist into the things navigational system and ripping it out. A squeal sounded as it swung wide, no longer aware of where he was.

He down it with one final explosion.

Katsuki wiped at his brow, carefully pulling out his phone to check the time.

9:37.

Two hours and twenty-three minutes to complete the mission and get the fuck back to the dorms. He cocked his head, listening for the sounds of Iida's engines. It was faint, quite a bit of distance away. God damn it. He was probably checking the area but keeping pace with Sero and Koda.

He would have to do the whole mission by his fucking self if he wanted a chance in hell of succeeding. And there was probably something in place that required four people because UA was a bitch like that. Calculating shady motherfuckers and their mind games and their moral points and spreading goodwill and romantic storylines and truth and justice.

Fucking Assholes, the lot of them.

Shota glanced at Nezu.

The black eyes were dead set on the screens. All of them. They'd activated all of the cameras in the Mountain district for this so they'd caught every instance of 'out of character' or 'odd' moments. Toshinori had been banned from the room, forced to watch the other students progress and ensure their safety alongside Ectoplasm.

"He's rushing them along," Nezu murmured.

Shota nodded.

They were an hour into the trial and yet Bakugou's group had been moving non-stop. Investigating every inch of their surroundings at a rigorous pace, even going to so far as to force Sero to take the burden of carrying Koji to move things along faster.

It was foolhardy and deplorable work.

He wondered why Iida would stand for such methods. It was one thing for Koda and Sero to go along with Bakugou, but Iida was much more opinionated and forceful.

"That's the third time he's checked his phone," Nezu's eyes moved to slits, his head turning just enough to look at Powerloader. "Is there a

way to hack his phone? I want to know if Bakugou is seeing something we're not."

Powerloader's face scrunched up but the man nodded, sitting at one of the nearby computers and typing away. The sound a bit distracting. Beside him Midnight was going through Bakugou's papers with a careful eye, looking for any hidden messages, though Shota was pretty sure she'd find nothing.

"He's checking the time," Powerloader announced. Shota's head snapped over to the man, looking at the screen to see the clock pulled up on a phone screen. "He's got a few alarms set... its kind of odd."

"How so?" Nezu asked.

"You said he goes to bed pretty early, right, Shota?"

"Yeah. Around 8:30, sometimes earlier."

"Well, he's got alarms on here for 11:30 P.M, 11:45 P.M, and 11: 59 P.M."

That was... odd, to say the least. Why would he...

"A warning system," Nezu said darkly. Shota turned to look at the High Spec's Quirk user, seeing the principles tail twitch in agitation. "All leading to Midnight, it would seem, which means that whoever is doing this is very punctual. Attacking or speaking to Bakugou at exactly Midnight."

"So the kid is trying to get this task done before Midnight then?" Snipe asked, staring incredulously at the screen. "There's no way. This task takes all freakin' night. Even for Pro-heroes. Its meant to test endurance and planning."

"I think on some level, Bakugou knows this," Nezu said quietly. "But he's trying to complete it anyways. He's stuck and doesn't quite know what to do about it, but he is unwilling to give up just because the task seems impossible."

Shota winced. That was very much his student.

"If something bad is going to happen at Midnight, then we should pull them out before then," Snipe puts forward, sounding thoroughly worried. "We can't have him out there at Midnight."

“No...” Nezu said slowly. “We need to see for ourselves what is taking place. The students know they are being watched from afar, but none of them are aware of just how closely we are monitoring them. If our knowledge of the situation might endanger Bakugou then it would be best that we play dumb, but we must figure this out if we are to move forward in stopping this.”

“What about the kids?” Shota demanded, feeling uneasy. “Won’t it be just as dangerous for them to know what is happening as us? If there was anyone Bakugou could go to for help, he would have. The problem is that it seems to be any knowledge translated to another person by any means. So even if its just the group of kids with Bakugou, it could still endanger him!”

Nezu hummed, eyes intent on the screen where the four were getting closer and closer to the hidden entrance. Their methods, while reckless, were at least effective, even if most of the team looked ready to drop at any moment. Bakugou had been destroying the primary obstacles in their path for the last hour and a half, bulldozing through the metal and wires at a rather impressive rate. He was sweating up a storm, probably causing his blasts to be that much more effective, limbs practically trembling in exhaustion.

“I believe Bakugou will come to a point where he will recognize the futility of his actions. At that point, he will abandon the others on their mission to seek shelter and privacy. He will not allow his group to see what is to come,” Nezu said carefully.

“But how can you be sure?” Shota demanded. “That is a dangerous assumption to make.”

Nezu glanced at him, his tail going still, but it was not the Principle who answered him. Recovery Girl had straightened up, her eyes looking much darker in the shade of the video feed than they did during the day.

“Cementos is hiding inside the Earth in the Mountains District. If Bakugou leaves it too late or if he needs a place to hide at a moment’s notice then Cementos will provide that space. We will not allow Bakugou to come to harm because of our own actions. For Bakugou, it will be a well-timed, happy coincidence. For us, it will be a fully recorded space for us to analyze what is happening to him, but as long as this threat remains in the shadows, then harm will come whether we want it to or not. We must take action.”

On the screen, Iida had found the entrance. A dirt-covered metal panel hidden under foliage. Aizawa checked his own watch, feeling his nerves stretched thin. It was 10:59 now. Which meant there was only an hour left before Midnight struck.

An hour for the team to get through the maze below. Gather the box of 'vital' documents. Takedown all the Villains involved. Before traveling to the surface world once more to deliver the information to headquarters.

They should be taking it easy at this point, resting and strategizing how to get inside the chambers below without being detected. But they'd blown up that strategy basically from the start. If this was truly a training session with grades rather than a set up to observe Bakugou then the group would have failed within the first five minutes.

He should have the lot of them here, in front of him, lecturing them on their many blunders and demanding an explanation for the faulty reasoning they'd been using from the get go.

As it stands...

He knew Bakugou was not in his right mind right now. He was in danger in some way and they were forcing the point here. There was nothing normal about what was going on. He was being forced to watch Bakugou stumble, the manic panic and fear resonating off of the screens left a bitter taste in his mouth.

He should be helping, not... exacerbating the problem. He understood the logistics. This was for the best. This was a means to attaining a solution. But every nerve in his body was ready for flight, to take off towards his student and assure him he didn't need to take another step, that he could rest.

Not this shit show in front of him.

Bakugou was ahead of the others on the screens. He was breathing hard, squinting down the hallways in a too tired to care manner that was so against his natural demeanor it made Shota cringe. He watched Bakugou pull just the top of his phone out, checking the time again. A look of frustration crossing his face.

'This isn't good,' the look said.

He could see the gears in Bakugou's head turning even as the boy moved forward, checking the rooms and signaling to the others who

were all practically bent over in wary resignation. They knew something was wrong. Just not what.

‘Just a little longer, kid,’ Shota urged silently. ‘I promise you, we’re going to fix this.’

Koji’s not sure how the maze led them up the mountain when they’d clearly been going down, but they all haul themselves out of the rock opening like dying men drowning in the ocean finding an island.

“Let’s... rest... for... like... ever...” Sero gasps, shaking his leg free of wires from the last robot he killed. “I’m just gonna...”

Sero lies down where he’s at. On the ground. Dirt smudging his face where oil and small cuts aren’t already crowding his skin. His elbows are spread out on either side of him much like a chicken and Koji wants to snicker at this, but honestly, he doesn’t have the extra breath, so he just slumps down next to him.

“Agreed! We will rest and regroup!” Iida announces though the words are said a bit breathlessly, the engine quirk user sitting on his knees in a manner that did not look comfortable at all in that armor of his. Iida takes out a water bottle and knocks back half of it in one swallow, offering the rest to Koji who doesn’t even hesitate. He does leave a little for Sero. He taps the tape user’s cheek and when Sero looks up at him half-heartedly, Koji pours the water in his mouth a little too fast and there’s a gurgling pitch to his voice as he swallows.

Oops.

“You losers... can rest... I’m going to... finish this shit.”

Koji would be far more impressed with Bakugou if he wasn’t barely standing, hands-on knees and wavering on his feet.

“Cut it out!” Sero moaned loudly.

Bakugou straightened, and ohhhhhh, that looked like it hurt. Koji winced at the stiff way Bakugou held himself. All that heavy gear looking like it probably weighed a ton. Their explosive classmate

huffed, before stomping over to grab the box from Iida.

“Enough, Bakugou! You know we have to complete this task together! I know you don’t want a failing grade and that is all you’re going to get if you continue with these shenanigans!”

Koji nodded emphatically.

What he said.

Wow that rock looked comfy.

Bakugou turned away from him. He saw the blonde pull out his phone... why did he have his phone during training? That really wasn’t allowed. For one, it was a distraction, mostly for Kaminari and Mina, but also because of how easily they could break during the course of training.

As quickly as it was taken out, it disappeared back into the blonde’s pocket.

“Fine,” Bakugou ground out. “I’ll scout ahead then. See where we are while you layabouts are wasting time.”

Where did his energy come from? Seriously, Koji wanted nothing more than to curl into a ball and cuddle up with Rabi. His bunny’s cheerful yet calm prattle was always a nice buffer to his classmates never-ending drama; good or bad.

Bakugou made to leap away when a shot of tape grabbed onto his ankle. Koji covered his mouth as he gapped in horror at Sero who looked vengefully victorious as Bakugou hit the ground. There was an ominous crack and Koji had the sinking feeling that had been Bakugou’s phone. The beast of 1A turned around, his spiky hair seeming to have a life of its own as he twisted around and got back onto his feet in a matter of seconds, stomping over and grabbing Sero by the front of his shirt, pulling the boy straight off the ground in a single powerful move that Koji had to admit really impressed him.

“What the fuck you motherfucking piece of shit! Have you lost your mind?!”

“Have YOU?!” Sero yelled, pushing back, fully standing up now. Koji’s hands went from his mouth to his eyes. Oh man. This wasn’t good. This wasn’t good at all. They were all going to be given detention for this, he just knew it! Oh man, oh man, oh man.

He wasn't the detention type.

Oh man. His mom was going to be so upset with him when he told her. Well... he could just... not tell her?

...

...

...

What was he saying?!

Of course, he would have to tell her. Jeez, where were his morals going. Right down the drain, it seems. He promised his parents he wasn't going to be one of those idiot people who starting lying just because he went away to school. They were always understanding, besides... if he just mentioned Bakugou...

"I ain't fucking lying you piece of shit!"

They would definitely understand.

"Could have fooled me! You haven't been honest all night!"

Why were they yelling? What good did that do?

Birds were starting to gather around them. Oh dear. He must be emoting. Drawing them in unintentionally. Well, it might be useful to have them nearby. Watch over them as they caught a bit of rest.

"Please! Is this necessary! We are in the middle of a..."

"Go fuck yourself Four-eyes!"

"Shut up Iida!"

Oh well... rest was perhaps too strong of a word. Koji stood up, more to distance himself from the small explosions showering from Bakugou's hand and the jutted out declaration of war Sero's elbows seemed to promise than an actual want to move. Even the Class rep looked rather pissed off at the whole situation, little blue baby fires igniting from his engines in what was probably unintentional.

Koji moved away from all three of them, wondering if it might be a not so bad idea to just... sneak off for a bit while they all cooled down. He took a step back and felt metal against his neck.

Koji squeaked and leaped back, nearly knocking into Sero.

“What...?”

It was a robot. Red eyes glittering in delight as it brings its arms down over them. Koji looks up at it almost resentfully, resigned that this is probably the worst night he’s had since the whole camping thing went down. And the first one isn’t technically Bakugou’s fault but this one definitely is and theirs the tiniest wisp of true annoyance he feels towards his classmate tonight because he feels the drama has been completely unnecessary.

‘I guess this is my life now.’

The arm swipes forward, managing to hit them all across the chest in their distraction, batting them all off the mountainside in a painfully easy attack they all should have seen coming from a mile away.

But didn’t.

‘Welp, this is gonna hurt.’

He begins to fall.

Izuku’s stomach had been upset all night. A sick feeling that wouldn’t go away. His group was resting on a skyscraper, Momo had made a mini heater for them along with a surprisingly intricate tea kettle and cups, pulling out tea leaves from a small bag on her hip. She’d cupped his hands and given him a knowing smile but hadn’t actually demanded he talk like Ururaka or Iida would have.

It was a nice feeling. To be left alone to his thoughts yet still be supported. He wasn’t sure how he’d gotten so lucky to have such wonderful classmates. Really, even Mineta who could be less than moral was a pretty decent guy. When push came to shove, he always came through... even if you had to push him a little harder than the others.

The two love birds, Ojiro and Hagakure, were sitting together, whispering a little too low for him to hear. Sitting a little too close. He

and Momo were sitting on the opposite side, giving them their privacy even though both insisted time and time again they weren't dating.

Even Kacchan had picked up on their not so secret relationship.

Which... basically required a neon billboard.

He pulled out the GPS marker again, double-checking that they were still heading in the right direction. Momo had theorized that the entrance would be well hidden, as she hadn't seen such blue-prints in the area before. The idea that there was a layer to the USJ beneath the already ridiculously extravagant training simulation area was mind-blowing but he really shouldn't be surprised at this point.

He shouldn't be surprised by anything at this point.

His stomach turned once more. He grimaced, pressing his fingers against the rolling sick feeling before looking around again. He sipped the hot tea, letting his eyes look out over the cityscape district. In the distance, over the mountains, he could see a plume of familiar smoke from an explosion and sweatdropped.

Well, he shouldn't be surprised that Kacchan wasn't doing well at stealth. He wouldn't be surprised if Todoroki... Yup. There was a giant Ice pillar in the distance around the Shipwreck District. He choked on his tea a bit as he tried to cover his own laugh, bubbles of hot liquid tipping over the lip as he pulled away and swallowed.

Momo raised her eyebrows at him. He nudged her and pointed first to Kacchan's area and then then Todoroki's. Her eyes looked glazed over for a second before she spotted what he was talking about, a sigh of exasperation escaping her before she buried her head in her hands.

"How can they be such complete polar opposites and yet so alike?" She whispered.

Izuku grinned, shaking his head and looking down at his own lap.

His stomach twisted again.

All Might always told him to listen to his instincts but what if he had no idea what his instincts were trying to tell him? Or what if it really was just a stomachache? Maybe the beef Ururaka had tried to cook this afternoon. Iida had been trying to warn him from behind her back and there had been a bit of smoke coming from the pots... but it hadn't tasted... totally awful and she'd had such a hopeful look on her

face.

There was no way he could have avoided eating that beef.

Though he had seen Ashido not so subtly tossing hers out the window when Ururaka wasn't looking. Maybe he should have tried the same tactic. Though with his luck he would have gotten caught and that would have been terrible to explain. He did not have Ashido's flair for excuses after all.

There was another heavy explosion.

Izuku stood up, looking at the Mountain District. His stomach twisted again. A dark feeling of alarm bursting forth in him as he stared at the large blooms of smoke and fire. His brows wrinkled as he tried to dismiss the feeling.

Kacchan always did have a tendency to overdo things.

Momo joined him, staring off in the distance. Her lips were pressed tight together, making one thin line. At least he wasn't the only one that felt that was off. She pulled her own GPS marker out, before glancing at him.

"You know... the mountain district is to the east of us, in the same direction as our marker. We could move in that direction and just... rest and strategize before moving in," Momo said quietly.

Izuku nodded, grateful.

A little closer, just in case.

He began to pack up, probably a bit faster than necessary, as Momo went over to the others. It was probably just a stomachache. Izuku glanced back over at the mountain district. The smoke spreading wide over the ridges.

Maybe it was just... the paranoia. What with the sludge monster and the League of Villains and their own fight. The quietness that had overtaken his childhood friend these last few months. Izuku had been uncomfortably aware of Kacchan's withdrawn, tense mood on the bus ride here.

Kacchan was probably just letting off steam.

None of those thoughts kept him or the others from packing up and

heading out faster than they normally would, nor did it stop them from moving a bit passed their target point to rest on a building far too close to the border between city and mountain.

They'd learned that being optimistic wasn't the same as being stupid.

Every muscle in his body is aching and when the arm of the robot comes at him, Koji doesn't stand a chance. He has only enough time to put his arms up to protect his chest and face when the metal slams into him. His feet skid backward, and into open air. His mind goes blank as he tries to figure out what to do.

But Koji does not drop.

He uncovers his eyes to see Katsuki Bakugou's hand fisted in his shirt. Other hand holding a white-knuckled grip on the tree branch above them, sticking out of the mountainside. Sweat beads the other boy's face and Bakugou grunts loudly as he pulls them both up and over the edge for a split second.

But the robot is still waiting for them.

"Hang on!" Bakugou grunts.

Koji throws his arms around his classmate's neck, closing his eyes as they leap off the cliffside. He hears the boom before they both shoot backward and his world spins as Bakugou does a backflip. The 'Boom!' 'Boom!' 'Boom!' of his quirk accompanied by a violent jerk in the opposite directions. Koji knows they are going down in a controlled manner, but it feels more like he's been dragged on a falling apart roller coaster ride and he can't help but wonder in awe how Bakugou moves like this all the time while still paying attention to his surroundings. It seems impossible.

They land too close together and Koji feels some of that sweat spread across his cheek and though he's grateful, there's a small worry about what having nitroglycerin on his skin could mean, knowing that it was a rather toxic chemical and Koji's immune system would definitely have him be patient zero in a zombie apocalypse situation.

Knowing that it probably wasn't bad in small amounts.

Besides, Kirishima or the others would probably be dead by this point, what with the way they tended to throw themselves at the explosive hero, if it was truly anything to worry about. Really, the whole Bakusquad would be long dead from toxic poisoning.

He should... probably thank him.

He opened his mouth to speak but noticed Bakugou was already standing, not bothering to brush off the dirt that covered him from head to toe. Already moving towards Iida and Sero, the tape quirk user removing long strips of tape from Iida's armor and looking like he was just as ready to sleep as Koji himself. Probably more so considering he'd spent most of the night carrying Koji around to keep up with their much faster teammates. Bakugou moved away from him with the retrieved box on his back, but he paused and half turned to Koji, pointing directly at him.

Koji blinked.

'You.'

Bakugou's fingers went up to his mouth before coming down to his hand.

'Good?'

Koji smiled, nodding. He wasn't deaf. He could hear fine. But he did think it was both sweet and odd that Bakugou knew sign language and seemed to use it without thought when it came to him.

Bakugou even yelled at him in sign language.

Which was... impressive.

Koji touched his fingers to his chin and pulled it away, before giving his explosive classmate a thumbs up.

'Thank you. I'm good.'

Bakugou nodded, taking off at a run to join the others. Gee wiz. Where did the guy get the energy? Koji pulled himself up, shaking his head as he gave it a light jog. He should have known he was going to end this night in an exhausted heap, being on the same team with the class rep and Bakugou. Yeesh.

When he joined the others it was to see Sero's normally wide smile turned downwards and an exasperated look spreading across Iida's face as Bakugou insisted he take care of the obstacles ahead for them. By himself.

"You can't keep this pace up, you're just as exhausted as the rest of us!" Iida yelled. "There is no reason for this!"

Oh well. It was bound to happen sooner or later.

"He smells off."

Koji glanced over at Hodge. The little fox had his head tilted to the side as he stared from the bushes. No one else knew he was there, the chittering noise, as his mother put it, couldn't be heard over the yelling.

Koji took a few steps left and sat on his hunches, pretending to rest.

"Who?" He whispered.

"The Red-eyed human smells wrong."

Koji looked over at Bakugou who was telling Iida that he would finish the mission himself instead of waiting for the 'losers' to get their shit together. The Class Rep's face was becoming more and more square-shaped as his jaw seemed to sharpen with every insult Bakugou threw. Back impossibly straight even for a guy in armor.

"How does he smell wrong?" Koji whispered.

"Smells like Rot. Not human."

Koji swallowed as a chill ran down his spine.

"He's sick?"

The fox's sharp eyes narrowed as he stretched, claws flexing out reflexively.

"No. Not sick. Rot."

"He's injured?" Koji tried, still not understanding.

The fox side-eyed him. Koji ducked his head. You never wanted to be side-eyed by a fox. The claws flexed again.

"He is a Felled tree," Hodge said slowly as if speaking to a child. "Left to rot. You can smell it on him."

Koji flinched. Usually, he understood the logic of animals. Most of the time better than humans. But this was too odd, too contradicting to what his own eyes were telling him. Bakugou was as lively as ever. Even if he looked sort of exhausted. Bakugou was not exactly the nicest person Koji had met, but he was certainly one of the most passionate. He had always been so full of life, brimming with talent and nerve.

A blast brought his attention back to the group.

Bakugou had apparently hit the end of his patience, heading towards the next checkpoint by himself.

Koji's muscles whimpered. He could easily curl up here under the foliage and sleep for a few hours. Sero too, from the looks of it. The taller boy who had been hauling him around all night, much to Koji's chagrin, had sat down a while ago and yelled out a curse seeing Bakugou leaving the group... again.

"What is with him tonight?!" Sero snapped, burying his head in his hands. "I don't get it. He's not like this normally, I swear!"

"No, no," Iida said slowly. "I agree. He *is* acting out of character. Even I can see that. The question is why? More importantly, how do we stop him? He's going to hurt himself at this rate. What he's doing is dangerous."

It was true.

Bakugou could be... passionate, but he usually was pretty calm in battle or training. This... behavior was... Well, Koji didn't really feel like the word could ever be put to the bold, brave student, but... it was almost as if he was panicked about something.

He glanced back at the Fox, but Hodge had lost interest now that Bakugou was gone, curled up at the base of a hole that was probably his den. Yu landed on his shoulder then, her head nudging his chin and her feathers brushing his neck.

"My lord, do you want us to follow him?"

Koji blushed, always thrown off guard by the formal tones of birds but nodded. He'd learned when he was five that it was improper and

insulting to ask a bird to refrain from such terms. Even if it made him uncomfortable.

The Kingfisher took off, commanding a fleet to follow her as they went in the direction of Bakugou. They would catch up quickly, he knew from experience, more because Bakugou might try to lie about it, but he was just as exhausted as they were and there was no way he could keep up this ridiculous pace up.

He had to stop at some point.

“...an’t stop an entire training session with everyone just because Bakugou is out of sorts.” Iida was saying.

“Somethings wrong though,” Sero said, his voice oddly sharp, high strung, for the normally chill student. “You know Bakugou wouldn’t act like this unless something was really wrong.”

“He’s being unnecessarily reckless, I agree, and this obsession with completing things as fast as possible is odd, but not exactly so different from what he’s aimed for in the past. Last session he proclaimed his team would have a perfect victory, remember?”

“I was on that team. I was part of his perfect victory,” Sero said dryly. “But he’s losing his shit here, this isn’t his ‘I’m fucking impressive and everyone will know it’ attitude. This is something else. He’s...”

“Scared,” Koji said quietly.

Still, in the dead of night, both of his classmates heard him just fine.

Iida’s eyes widened for a moment, glancing over at him in surprise. His brows furrowed, hand going to his chin as he looked at the ground in thought. For the first time that night, the patience and tolerance Iida had been showing for the odd behavior was turning into genuine concern. Koji realized with a start that Iida hadn’t been willing to associate Bakugou with those types of feelings either and he felt immense relief that he’d been brave enough to voice his thoughts out loud.

There was a pregnant pause between them where they allowed that thought to truly sink in. Katsuki Bakugou, winner of the Sports Festival, guy who was kidnapped by the League of Villains and fought them off one against six, who smiled in the face of insurmountable odds, was scared on this standard night training session where the only danger was a few robots.

“You’re both right,” Iida said in resignation. “Something is very wrong here. The teachers are observing the battle from afar so they probably are aware in some form that things are not as they should be.”

“Should we?” Sero tapped their Emergency Com.

Iida shook his head.

“Once an emergency com is activated, it stops the entire training session and sends out a GPS marker to every hero in the vicinity. While I will agree there is something wrong, I don’t believe it requires that sort of reaction. Stopping Bakugou and bringing him back to the teachers is what we should be focusing on and the appropriate measures, I think.”

Koji winced at the fight that was to come. Iida said ‘stopping Bakugou’ so easily as if it wouldn’t be a tougher mission than the training session itself. He subtly stretched his arms and legs out, wary and already feeling the bruises that would no doubt form thanks to this little session of forcing their classmate to get help for whatever was wrong.

Yikes, what a terrible mess they were in.

“Anima!” His back straightened at the sound of his hero name, right, they were supposed to be using those in reference to each other. Though it still felt odd to hear. Iida was looking him straight in the eye and he had to force himself not to duck his head, to be brave. “While I don’t approve of the idea of using our coms just yet, I do think that a more thorough explanation of the situation to our observing teachers is necessary. Do you think you could send a messenger to deliver a message for us?”

Koji nodded, pulling out a small scroll from a hidden pocket. A string already attached for such purposes. He quickly wrote a small letter, using words that would explain the levity of the situation while not creating panic. He did well at that. Much better in the written word than trying to stumble through speaking.

He called Mayana to him. The male white wagtail landing with a dramatic bow that almost had Koji rolling his eyes if that too wasn’t a sign of disrespect.

“My loooord, what might I do for you on this fine evening?”

“Please deliver this to Sensei, the scruffy man with cloth wrapped

around his neck and ‘dead eyes,’” As many of his animal companions had described the man. He figured that would help the bird locate him faster even if he didn’t quite agree with the analysis himself. ‘Sleep deprived’ or ‘asleep while standing’ felt much more accurate, but he wasn’t one to argue with an animal’s assessment.

“Of course, honorable one, thy word is my pleasure to follow!” Mayana proclaimed, wings bowing once more before taking off. *“I delight in your every order, my looooooord, please always use me as an extension of your words! Praise to thee for considering me above all else! I will cherish this...”*

The bird’s words began to fade the further away he flew and Koji felt himself sweat drop in embarrassment, happy, at least, to know no one else could understand the creature. Sero gave him a pitying look.

“Man, why was that bird so pissed at you? I’ve never seen an animal yell at you like that.”

It was also good that animals could not understand humans, as the half dozen birds still hanging around them, waiting in anticipation for his orders, would be traumatized by such a misunderstanding.

“He was just... excited,” Koji said quietly, trying to explain to Sero without unintentionally hurting his smaller friend’s feelings. That was something he always had to be careful about. Since both animals and humans understood his words, but neither understood the other. His explanations of human behavior to animals and his explanations to humans about animal behaviors all had to be catered in such a way that neither would be insulted or hurt by his words.

He could never be so straight forward like Iida or placating like Sero or blunt with no regards to others like Bakugou. That would end in the destruction of his relationship with either animals or humans. Animals had a highly complicated culture that had taken him years of messing up to learn, each tribe (species) requiring different types of speech and behavior, but all wanting a certain type of respect.

“Let us be on our way!” Iida said, gesturing in the direction Bakugou took off.

Koji sighed.

Iida spoke a little too much like the birds.

Hanta watched Koda slip his thumb between two of his fingers, the tip sitting on his ring finger. The sign for 'N.' Before his hand moved upwards. Bakugou had gone North. Hanta nodded, his tape propelling him forward, through the trees and deeper into the woods.

Why would Bakugou go backward?

The checkmark point was in the complete opposite direction. And Hanta knew Bakugou's navigational skills were on point as he was always keeping their group on track the few instances when their class was allowed on supervised weekend trips to the downtown mall area.

He flipped to give himself a better landing view, his tape stretching out to grab at a rock face above him. Just as he was about to move downwards again, he spotted Bakugou sliding hurriedly into a crevice in the earth.

He shot out tape in that direction, moving slightly northeast even as the confusion overtook him. What was he doing? They had their objective. Even if there were robots down there, why would he waste the time destroying them? None of this was making sense.

Hanta swung hard left, skimming the ground for a few feet before his next tape shot propelled him forward and up into the air again, almost directly over the crevice that was...

Wait.

What?

It was... is was closing?

It was closing over Bakugou?!

Hanta attached tape over the entrance, pulling himself downwards and forcing himself inside before it could close over and trap his friend. The creaking of the earth stopped though, the moment Hanta entered the hole, dirt falling on his face as he landed harsh enough that his knees quaked. Before his suspicions could fully form though, he caught a glimpse of Bakugou.

There was no light in the mountain's opening except for the small

glow of Bakugou's phone. It lit up his friend's face, the dark circles looking far more dramatic against the wide-eyed stare the explosive hero was giving the screen. One earbud in, one hanging limply against his sides, his hand digging around in his pocket for something.

'Really?!'

"This is what was so important you bailed on us? Playing on your phone?" Hanta demanded incredulously.

Bakugou whirled, cursing loudly as the earbud fell out and tumbled into the pitch dark and dirt surrounding them. He was staring at Hanta like he'd crawled out of a maggot-infested hole and come to devour him.

"You need to go."

Hanta scuffed.

"No. You need to get out of this hole. What the hell are you doing?!" Hanta demanded in frustration, walking further into the darkness of the hole they were in. "Seriously, this is... it's insane! Whatever your issue is, just tell us! This isn't like you and to be frank, you're freaking me out!"

"Get the fuck out! You need to go!" Hanta stopped in his tracks in shock at the sheer panic in Bakugou's voice. Before he could make another demand, strong arms were pushing him. Shoving him. "Go! Please!"

What the ever-living fuck was going on!? Did Bakugou just beg him!? Did he just-

The hand shoving him suddenly grabbed his shoulder in such a tight grip he thought his collar bone was breaking. He cried out, only to realize there was a cry of pain mingling with his own. Bakugou fell forward, sliding down Hanta's body and onto the dirt.

"Hey... Hey!"

The phone clinked against the ground, its meager light not strong enough to reach their forms. Rather, he was left, grasping at Bakugou, pulling him up, a blind hold him against his chest as he looked around in panic. Being so close he could suddenly hear the ragged breathing, the harsh agonized breaths. Bakugou was seizing against him, small convulsions going through his body.

Oh man. Oh man, oh man, oh man. This was bad. This was really bad. What the hell?!

Hanta wrapped his arm around Bakugou's waist, lowering him to the ground and trying to see what was wrong.

"Bakugou, you have to tell me what this is, you can't... Blasty, I... just... I'm gonna get you out and then we're going to get you help."

Bakugou didn't respond.

He shot out tape and connected them to the hole's entrance, pulling them up and out in an instant, there was a jerk in Bakugou's breathing, a pained hitch. A 'caw' sounded too close to his ear and when he glanced over it was to see a Crow looking at him with too much intent, taking flight even before Hanta hit the ground.

Koda would know where they were soon. Good. Then Iida wouldn't be too far behind and could take Bakugou to Recovery Girl that much sooner. Hanta laid his friend down, trying to get a better look at where the injury could be. But nearly every inch of him was covered from toes to chin.

Where did the grenades go? Did Bakugou take them off in the hole? It didn't matter. None of that mattered. He felt around for the zipper on the back of his hero's costume but found something around his wrist. He looked down to see Bakugou weakly gripping his wrist, his face impossibly pale, the most minuscule shake of his head telling him 'no.'

"Don't be a stubborn idiot!" Hanta snapped, shaking Bakugou's grip loose.

How could he, even now, be so prideful! Everyone got hurt. Hanta though Bakugou was better than this. No. He was better than this. So what the hell was he doing? Why was he acting like this!?

He heard Iida's engines igniting not so far off.

He unhooked the neck and arm bracers, dropping them on the ground in his haste before yanking the costume down Bakugou's chest and off his arms.

He stopped.

"What?" The word came out in a single breath as he stared down at the mess in front of him. Black and grey spreading outwards from

every vein on his friend's body. Like an infection. It looked diseased. A purplish-black bruising darkening his skin in patches underneath the darker webbing.

Bakugou coughed, his breath coming out in a wheeze so pained Hanta feared it would stop breathing.

No.

No. Bakugou wouldn't ignore this. He wouldn't. HE WAS BETTER THAN THIS! He was... Hanta glanced at Bakugou's face, looked in his friend's eyes. The pained guilt in them. The way he curled into himself. Eyes sliding away from Hanta, refusing to look directly at him.

Bakugou convulsed against.

He wasn't supposed to hold a seizing person, right? Hanta laid him down, feeling sick as Bakugou jerked, his body seizing painfully against the grassy ground before going lax. He coughed and... blood. Shit. No.

No. No. No.

Hanta leaned forward, tilting Bakugou's head to the side and seeing red spill passed too pale lips. Bakugou moved his mouth and Hanta moved closer, trying to hear...

"Tongue... mouth..." the word trailed off.

He... Bakugou... bit his tongue.

He...

Hanta felt the pocket Bakugou had been digging into, pulling out the familiar mouthguard with a sick, dread-filled feeling.

This was...

He slipped the mouth guard into Bakugou's mouth. An empty pit forming in his stomach as he sat back and let that sink in. Let the mouth guard and the blood and the familiarity of this sink in.

In his mind's eye he sees Mina setting up the Playstation. He hears Bakugou growling at them to 'Get out.' Voice serious and angry. He sees Bakugou rip his mouth guard out, tossing it onto his bed so that he can better yell at them. He sees Kaminari sneaking around,

playfully grimacing as he picks up and pockets Bakugou's mouth guard, wagging his eyebrows at Hanta as the much taller boy shakes his head, but smiles.

He sees blood running down Bakugou's face and chin, down his throat and coating his shirt- storming passed his door as he opens it to see what all the noise is about at four in the freaking morning. He sees the explosive hero not even looking at him as he grips his mouthpiece and slams the door so loud that Shoji, patient guy that he is, even peeks out and glances at Bakugou's door in reproachful annoyance.

He sees Bakugou the next morning. The tip of his tongue missing and looking exhausted and guilty. Avoiding looking at them. Moving like a violent, defensive dog, fangs bared but tail between his legs.

Panic takes him as he stares down at the mess and the horrible realization starts to sink in like a lead weight. Because that's not what's happening. That's not what's been happening. Bakugou doesn't suffer from seizures at night. That's stupid. He's not asleep right now. Why would it only happen at night? That's such a ridiculous thought.

Bakugou would tell someone.

He might be impatient and volatile and prideful, but he wasn't stupid.

He can't take his eyes off of it though. It looks so painful, so awful, Bakugou should be in a hospital for this. This is... what is this?! All of his brain cells are firing off like fireworks on New Years but no connections are being made.

As Iida comes to a halt, steps stumbling as they catch sight of what Hanta is holding, there's only one thought that strikes him above the others: *'It was never nightmares.'*

He can hear the emergency com being used and... oh yeah... he had one of those too. He should probably have used that, shouldn't he? It feels heavy in his ear, like the mantra of 'stupid' and 'oblivious' running on loop in his head. They'd been so proud of themselves for noticing. For trying to help, when really they had no fucking idea at all.

Out of the corner of his eye he can see Koda looking stricken, his hands looking like he wants to reach out, and Hanta guesses he gets up the nerve because he feels the heavy, gentle hand land on his shoulder, and the feel of a body crouching beside him.

“Do you... want me... to take him?” The voice is impossibly soft and Hanta can’t help but think of Bakugou who has always been impossibly gruff. Polar opposites. Hanta nods his head, because he doesn’t trust his voice. He wants to shout that Iida should take him. That they needed to move, to get things done! But his words are stuck in his throat and vaguely he’s aware of another voice on the com barking out orders to stay where they are.

Koda takes Bakugou in his arms, hand under his legs and chest pulled towards his own in a princess style hold that Bakugou would no doubt be pissed as hell about. Blasty doesn’t protest though. The pained breathing is so loud in Hanta’s ears, a wheezing thing that seems to encompass all the sounds in the world.

He’s aware Iida’s gone, but he doesn’t know where he went.

He doesn’t know until he’s back, Recovery Girl in his arms... oh. Oh! That made sense, didn’t it? They didn’t know what was wrong with Bakugou so it probably wasn’t the best idea to have the injured teen being carried at who knows what speed.

Green lightning sweeps his vision.

Midoriya.

Chapter 16: Kacchan

Chapter Summary

The Doctor's plans laid bare and repercussions abound.

Chapter Notes

Season 4 Premiers today guys!!

I think you guys might genuinely murder me for this chapter. This was always the plan. Always. But gosh, just when you guys didn't think it could possibly get any worse... I dug a hole. It's a bumpy ride from here guys, not going to lie.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter 16: Kacchan

Izuku shoots off the moment the emergency com activates. He doesn't need the voice in his ear detailing the location nor does he need the mechanical voice reporting that it's Kacchan's group that requested help. On either side of him he can see the robots being deactivated. The training session is over.

He's moving so fast that his surroundings blur, but Izuku still feels like he's moving too slow. He's moving about the forest like a demented rabbit, leaping from rock to rock, trying to listen for the familiar sound of explosions but they've stopped.

There are no more explosions going off.

Izuku pushes 8% to 9% and feels the strain on his muscles, but they don't tear. They don't break and that's all that really matters. After what feels like a painfully long time he spots Koda's back and Sero.

Sero with blood down his front sitting shell shocked on the ground.

"Midoriya!" Iida's voice is as abrasive as always, but tonight it sounds fractured. "Recovery Girl is handling everything. Why don't we..."

Izuku gently pushes his friend out of the way. There's still green lightning running along the entirety of his body and the push causes

metal clad armor to move backwards as if it were nothing more than cheap plastic. Iida looks disapproving but unsurprised and as always he falls in line behind him despite his own feelings and Izuku doesn't know if he'll ever be able to voice the reassurance he feels at that support.

He sees Kacchan's feet first, far too still and curled up in a way he's never seen his teeth gritting and stubborn 'I don't feel pain' childhood friend before. He pauses when he sees his chest and arms, the black seeping out of Kacchan's veins and spreading out like some infection eating him alive from the inside out. For a moment he stands in shock, but the ragged, wheezing breaths, the wet sound as if there's blood in the back of Kacchan's throat, has him flashing over to his side. Green lightning is running wild along his own skin and he's not sure if his knees hit the ground first or if his hands grab hold of Kacchan's limp one first.

All he really knows is that 'of course, it's Kacchan.'

Izuku's never really thought his lucks been what someone would consider 'good.' At least not until he met All Might. The good luck had quickly stacked alongside responsibilities and expectations that Izuku was more than happy to take on.

But.

For Kacchan it's been the complete opposite. He can't seem to catch a break. Izuku feels like he's back in that hallway, listening to their mother's talk. Knowing Kacchan deserved to be punished for hitting him but never, ever wanting Kacchan to be hurt like *that*. Wishing fervently, he could take back all the ill wishes and hate filled thoughts. They've come so far and yet things for Izuku keep getting better and better, including his relationship with Kacchan, but things for Kacchan always seem to be getting worse and worse.

"Shitty... nerd..." Kacchan reprimands him through a mouth guard, fighting desperately for air. The words sound like they pain him to say and Izuku jerks up to look into deep red eyes that are impossibly calm. "Stop... leaking... on... me."

Izuku squeezes his hand tighter, the tears continuing to fall onto Kacchan's chest and neck, salt mixing with nitroglycerin, and Izuku keens as his whole body folds and his forehead falls against the hand he's holding onto too tightly.

It looks so bad.

It looks like All Might's wound except there's no indentions. There's no clear entry wound. Just a black infection that looks like its spread *everywhere*. Izuku's moved straight from recognizing how bad this is and how long Kacchan must have been hiding it, to what the hell could have possibly done so much damage and when.

His head keeps turning, flipping and flopping, and still the same image persists of a man of death hovering in the air. One capable of taking out several Pros in a matter of seconds as if they meant *nothing* to him. Not in terms of power and certainly not in terms of human value.

'But even Kacchan wouldn't keep silent that long.'

He knows that thought is a lie though.

Doesn't he?

Because even as children Kacchan could go silent for weeks and weeks. He could move through everyone and everything like they didn't exist. Brush them off. Push them away. Kacchan could shut down and move along and still maintain a 4.0 G.P.A because he was just that kind of a person. Always had been.

And they all knew something was wrong.

They could all see it.

Kacchan had been a wreck after getting kidnapped. Blaming himself for All Might's retirement. Failing the Provisional License Exam. Going quiet and withdrawn shortly afterward. Getting sick. Not eating. For weeks and weeks.

He feels betrayed again.

Because Izuku has told Kacchan *everything*. Even All Might's secret. He has been honest and open since they were kids and Kacchan *never* trusts him. Not with anything. Still... There isn't anything in the world that could make him let go of his hand right now. A hand that is far too cold to be Kacchan's and far too limp. He feels Kacchan trying to tighten his fingers around Izuku's hand, but he can't. The digits won't bend.

Izuku looks back up at Kacchan to see those red eyes watching him. There's so much pain in those eyes, but they're so *resigned*. It makes him feel sick to his stomach. Kacchan looks so used to this. He looks

like he's completely unbothered even as Izuku feels his body tense up, seize, jerk violently in pain, before going still again. He doesn't break eye contact and Kacchan doesn't either. He doesn't flinch. He just... he rides out the pain like its nothing.

Izuku doesn't understand.

The weak hold on his arm loosens and Izuku's heart nearly stops as he sees Kacchan slump down, his eyes closing.

"I put him to sleep," Recovery Girl said grimly. "He was in a lot of pain and I couldn't... I couldn't move him like that."

'Could have said something beforehand,' Izuku thinks as he pats his heart. For a moment, for a split second, he'd thought Kacchan had... that he'd been too late. He'd been back at the camp, staring at blue flames and darkness and feeling loss. A deep pit that was the thought that he would never see Kacchan again.

The person who was not quite a friend and not quite family, but enough of both. The person he gravitates too naturally without his consent. Who seems to inspire him and exasperate him all in one fell swoop.

"Deku's more like an annoying little shit of a brother than anything."

A brother.

Yeah.

That fits. With a little shoving and a few broken edges anyways. The title fits into the slot that's always been open, but unlabeled in his heart. Something of a question until now of what they are to each other. It seems Kacchan knew a lot longer than Izuku had.

He squeezes the limp hand against him as their teachers arrive and a stretcher is brought over. There's grim faces and dark looks and when he finally looks up he sees Aizawa staring down at Katsuki with eyes wider than he's ever seen them and he looks upset. Visually upset and not bothering to hide it.

But it's not Aizawa Sensei who gathers him up in his arms and holds Izuku for a very long time as his classmates begin to arrive and people start to shout questions.

No.

It's All Might. Toshinori bundles him up in a hug and walks with him with one arm slung over his shoulder for the whole walk back to the bus. The tall, emaciated man doesn't leave his side even though they are in full view of everyone. Even though this entire past year and a half has been about keeping their connection a secret.

In all of that time All Might only says one thing, but he says it loud enough that every one of his classmates can hear him.

"We're going to fix this."

Izuku believes him. Not because he trusts authority figures completely. He knows enough to know that adults and Pro-heroes don't always have the answers. He believes it because it's All Might. The man who destroyed his own body and left behind One For All for good to make sure Kacchan was rescued from the very pits of hell that was Kamino.

All Might, who Izuku had seen struggle with a horrible wound fight after fight, who faced down All For One and won, and who did not make promises lightly [despite what some might claim]. All Might was promising Izuku they would help Kacchan.

So Izuku believes him.

Doctor Tsubasa felt his joints pop as he stretched, tapping his fingers in thought along the desk as he listened to Gigantomachia fill him in on the development of Tomura. So many things to get done and not nearly enough time in which to do them.

He turned in his chair to glance at the sleeping woman on his couch, the exhaustion from continuously overusing her quirk wreaking havoc upon her. It couldn't be helped though. If she wanted the development Tomura had with his own Decay quirk, they needed to stress it and her passed her limits. Continuously. Until one or both broke.

That truly was the only key to awakening. All For One himself had observed over the centuries that there was not much else that could instigate the next level of evolution for quirks. Stressing the body until

it is forced to either pass away into nothing or explode into a power unmatched.

Her words though... as her eyes had rolled into the back of her head...

"They Know."

Well... what a lovely development. Took much longer than he'd expected for it all to come to the surface. Really, he'd been aware, of course, that Katsuki Bakugou was a stubborn child. Always had been. All the way back when he would order around the Doctor's own grandchild with such authority! It has been such a precocious thing to behold.

He was lucky, he supposes, that his grandson had gotten his mother's wings instead of his father's own 'biological transmutation' quirk. Else Katsuki might have recognized him by his friend's quirk. As it stands, the boy had never bothered to look twice at him when he was a child, too engrossed in commandeering his friend's attention to bother with adults.

Even as a child though... it had been clear the boy was meant for something quite special.

"Gramps! Come here! Kacchan showed me how to fold a crane! Let me show you! Let me show you!"

"Kacchan led us deep into the forest! He showed us how to build a fort from hanging branches! It was so cool."

"Hey, hey, can you drop me off at the park? Kacchan promised to play the Villain today and he never wants to do that! He's always the hero and today I want to be!"

Smart as a whip. Leadership skills. Hard-working. Ambitious. Over-confident, perhaps, but so passionate. When Tomura had first mentioned him, he'd been entirely unsurprised the boy had found his way onto the Master's prodigy's radar. Though when the decay user had suggested trying to convince him to join their side he'd had a hard time suppressing his laughter. There was zero chance Katsuki Bakugou, Kacchan as his grandson had fondly called him, would ever be a villain.

Quietly, he laid his own plans down for when Tomura's blew up in his face.

“Thank you for your diligence,” he told Gigantomachia. “I am glad Tomura’s work with the Liberation Army is fairing well. Everything still on schedule for April?”

“Yes.”

The destruction of everything. The Doctor had to stop himself from guffawing. Such a childish notion. But if Tomaru managed to take down the reigning government at least, well, he certainly wouldn’t be opposed to that. Chances were it would be on a much smaller scale. Shaking the hero foundation to its core. Causing Laws to be rewritten. A change in the power balance.

Yes.

That would work out nicely.

“As always, I have my own plans running in the background.” He tells All For One’s most devoted follower. “Tell Tomaru the Nomu and I will be working through Christmas to help him... something to look forward to on the news. A Christmas gift, if you will. It will be involving his favorite U.A student.”

“Of course, I will inform our King,” the rumbling voice replied, delighted. They were both within All For One’s inner circle, but Gigantomachia was well aware he was not the smartest of individuals and was always unreasonably pleased for the Doctor to include him in his thoughts and plans. As he had explained time and again, the Doctor trusted the man and believed that loyalty deserved recognition and favoritism.

The radio rattled like the dying breath of the terminally ill before giving out entirely.

With the advance in technology, radio signals were mostly ignored. Considered an out dated version of communication and Doctor Tsubasa found that anonymity to be wonderfully convenient even if it could be less than reliable on occasion.

Besides that, All For One was, understandably, an old fashioned sort of bloke who appreciated the throw-backs the Doctor pulled out of the woodwork. They both kept up with technology and utilized it, of course, but there was a sort of genius in using systems everyone else kept away from.

His fingers flew across the keyboards, the steady clicking relaxing the

slight pressure in his head warning of an oncoming headache. Bakugou tended to cause that during these late-night evenings while the Doctor's quirk was in use to keep him alive. Speaking of...

Doctor Tsubasa pulled up Bakugou's file.

The normal stats showed up. Number one in the Entrance Exam. Number One at the Sport's Festival. Ranked Number three in the Class for both academics and heroics training. There were other articles there too. One for the Sludge Villain Attack. One for the boy's involvement in some overseas incident on I-Island. Several involving his kidnapping by the League of Villains.

Those were all public records available to anyone.

Doctor Tsubasa paused as he felt a healing quirk being applied to the body. His lips curled upwards in a smile as his own headache subsided with the additional healing being done. The body, for all intents and purposes, functioned just like Bakugou's body.

The organs all functioned.

Bakugou's quirk worked with the flesh and bone just as the Doctor had designed.

The Biological Transmutation he'd performed to create it from a corpse had been perfect in every way. For all intents and purposes, it was a living organism again.

No brain or mind, of course.

Doctor Tsubasa had been using his quirk for years to make money in the black market selling organs and experimenting on creatures and humans for the improvement of quirks. Using his ability to transmute diseases into living flesh, to change bruised flesh into unblemished skin, the ability to change both living and dead organisms with a touch of his black-tipped fingers had aided All For One well.

But.

Well, a living breathing body had sort of a limited span on opportunities, didn't it?

Which is where Rheina comes in.

Her puppeteer quirk was the butter on his bread, the canvas for his

artistic fingers, the milk in his coffee. Able to forcefully take the mind from someone and plant it somewhere else. Trap it.

Unfortunately...

He swiveled in his chair to peer at the Elite Nomu. His perfect creations, combining the bodies of different quirk users into one. With the first set of Nomu's, he had not had Rheina's power then and had been forced to rely on the mind that was in the foundation body before transmutation.

Now though.

Well, the Elites were those Nomu created and then Rheina forcing a mind into them permanently. They were better. Much better. However, the mind was still butchered in the process.

Which is where the experiment with Bakugou was coming in handy. Testing the limits of the mind with a created body. The problem, of course, was that they had not anchored Bakugou's mind to the Nomu.

Not permanently.

They'd seen the effects that caused and were trying a new route.

Bakugou's body had been left in-tact. Alive. The connection between the mind and body had been left whole. Unlike the Elite Nomu, Rheina had not severed the link, and thus... had not butchered the mind.

Of course...

This caused an entirely new set of problems.

The first and most obvious being that Rheina could not keep her quirk active 24/7. Constantly pulling the mind from the original and maintaining it in the Nomu. She had to sleep. And the moment she fell asleep, the Nomu began to stop functioning, began to rot. The mind trying desperately in that time to return to the body and on a few occasions had moderately succeeded.

So they'd found a routine.

Putting Rheina to sleep at exactly midnight and allowing her to rest for a few hours while Doctor Tsubasa's quirk kept the Nomu body from dying of rot. A quick scan through Bakugou's files and a few

simple lies had been enough to cover up this huge weakness in their quirks and the intended experiment.

Honestly, the lack of questioning about the sincerity of Villains from someone as rough as Bakugou had surprised him to no end. The boy had believed him 100% about the Quirimorbus and believed it was simply a means to getting him to join the League of Villains.

So small-minded.

But then again, as much as he and the public liked to forget, Bakugou was but a child. A powerful and talented one, no doubt, but deception, stealth, subterfuge... these were not traits the boy possessed.

His files detailed Phase 1.

The health of the body. Rheina's reports on the health of the mind as she listened in to conversations and observed through his eyes the boy's own actions. The plethora of information coming in was unimaginable before now.

Phase 1, of course, had been simply testing if the body would actually continue to function under such conditions. Having the mind constantly straining against Rheina to return to its body. In this, Doctor Tsubasa feels they made the right choice in keeping Bakugou in the dark, as his conscious mind was not actively fighting against them now because it wasn't aware that there was something it could fight.

Phase 2 had been the introduction to the other Nomus. Testing to see if they would recognize one of their own. Seeing how well they worked together. Seeing how the Nomu responded to Bakugou and how Bakugou responded to the Nomu.

As far as testing was concerned, Bakugou seemed entirely unaware of any connection. Though a few of the Nomu had shown signs of recognizing Bakugou for what he was. Which was good. It meant if Rheina commandeered controlled and used Bakugou to command the Nomu they were that much more likely to respond well to the command without Doctor Tsubasa having to put in much effort.

Phase 3 would be forcing the awakening of the quirk. Doctor Tsubasa had been having a hard time debating when the best time to attempt this was considering the boy's security around him had become tighter and tighter lately, but since the 'secret' had been blown out of the water, he wouldn't have to hide anything anymore.

Now it wouldn't matter.

The first portion of experimentation was over. Which left him a bit sad as it had been quite fun and awe-inspiring to see Bakugou's data accumulating. But he'd expected this portion to be finished with quite a while ago, so it wasn't as if he was unprepared to move forward.

He could stress the body and mind to his heart content while the heroes ran around trying to fix things and 'save' the boy. All the while never knowing that they never rescued Katsuki Bakugou at all.

He stood up, walking steadily to the very back of the room to put his hand on the glass of one of his favorite tubes. Recovery Girl must have put the boy to sleep because he could see red eyes slit open, glaring at him. On those rare occasions when Rheina and Bakugou were asleep at the same time, a feat considering how much pain the boy was normally in when the Nomu body began to rot, the mind would attempt to go back to the body.

"Nightmares," Rheina had told him. Bakugou believed these were reoccurring nightmares.

Doctor Tsubasa smiled and waved.

Katsuki Bakugou, struggling through wires, tubes, and what must surely feel like suffocation from the pressure of thick life support bio-liquid, still managed to lift his left hand and maneuver his middle finger up against the glass.

"Such a feisty, beautiful creature you are," his grin stretched. "I'm going to enjoy carving your brain out for Phase 4."

Sparks flew over his knuckles and palm as Denki tried to settle his bubbling emotions back into his chest where they belonged. His thumb running along the rest of his fingers in an agitated, imitation of a piano player.

He hadn't seen what happened.

He couldn't see Bakugou right now.

Only Sero who wasn't freaking saying anything and there was blood down his front. He was being herded like a sheep by Mina and Kirishima kept craning his head in the direction the teachers had gone with the stretcher as if he could magically develop a giraffe quirk to see off into the distance if he just tried hard enough.

The goody two shoes parade- Iida and Midoriya and Koda weren't saying anything, of course. Which normally would make him feel fond or exasperated, but honestly just pissed him off right now.

They didn't have the right to withhold information about his friend who was *hurt*. Not saying anything wasn't respecting privacy or gossiping. They all cared about Bakugou and it was... it was a dick move to take the high and mighty road and not say *anything* about what was happening.

Jeez.

He hadn't seen this many teachers here since USJ. Which, by the way, totally did not reassure him *at all*, he was definitely feeling the opposite of chill. The man, the Villain, whose quirk was oddly similar to his still gave him nightmares. Maybe he hadn't been fully aware of the threat of death when it had been delivered, but he'd been aware enough and the hold on his back with the familiar feel of electricity sizzling along his spine still brought back memories of that day.

And now this.

Never a dull moment.

"Do you know what's going on?" Mineta whispered to him as he walked up. Denki shook his head.

"I just know Bakugou was hurt somehow, but somethings wrong. If it was just a normal wound, Sero wouldn't be acting like that and... why were all these teachers *already here*? It's like.."

"They knew something bad was going to happen," Mineta finished his thought. "Yeah. I heard Shoji and Tokoyami theorizing about it. I think everyone else has picked up on it too."

It was true that everyone was tense, and nobody was speaking very loudly. Huddled in groups as they waited just outside of the bus. Bakugou had already been bundled into a van with Recovery Girl- and okay, why did they already have the van waiting here? He'd gotten a glimpse inside and it had seemed to have medical stuff on hand.

Was it because Bakugou has been sick all week?

Was something else going on? Something worse than they thought and so the teachers knew to be prepared? But why would they let Bakugou participate if they suspected something was wrong? None of this was adding up and all of his ‘suspicious as all hell’ boxes were being checked off with a thick red marker.

“They’ll explain, I’m sure,” Ururaka said and yikes! Jeez, he needs to pay attention more because he didn’t hear her approach at all. “They aren’t going to leave us in the dark like this. Not after everything we’ve been through.”

He swallowed and nodded.

“Yeah...” He agreed, though even to his own ears it sounded half-hearted.

Disbelieving.

“Hey,” Mineta called out to him. “Look at it this way, we’ve never had two bad things happen in one day, so we’ve met our quota.”

“Thanks for that,” Ururaka muttered darkly. “You jinxed us.”

“Did not,” Mineta snapped, though he looked unsure.

Denki dragged his fingers through his hair.

“No offense, bro, but why don’t you avoid giving motivational speeches when you go Pro.”

“Whatever,” Mineta muttered grumpily, heading towards the bus. One of the teachers had apparently signaled the okay for them to start loading onto it. Tsuyu, Midoriya and All Might were already sitting in the back when he followed everyone onto the bus.

His comment must have hurt Mineta’s feelings more than he thought because his much shorter friend took a seat really far away from him. He paused on his way to sit by Mina and Sero, watching in dismay as Kirishima picked up Bakugou’s new jacket, folding it up carefully and placing it on the seat next to him. As if Bakugou was going to stomp in at any second and snatch it up and pause, seeing the folding and nod at Kirishima in acknowledgement of the nice thing done for him before grumpily pulling it on and sitting between them all.

Mina was the only one with color in their group, but even she was looking white compared to the sickening lack of color between them, ranging from pale and sick to ashen. She had one hand on her hip and one clutching Sero's shoulder as she watched their classmates continue boarding.

"Blasty's gonna be fine," Mina told them firmly. "He's King Explosion Murder, he can't be taken down for more than a few hours, tops."

"Unless he's being taken down every night."

They all stilled at Sero's words. Denki tried to swallow, to ask what that was supposed to mean, but found his throat dryer than a desert. Sero was staring at the ground, his face blank.

"What are you talking about?!" Kirishima hissed. "Sero, what did you see?!"

Denki winces because he knows Kirishima hasn't been sleeping well. That he's been listening in silently with his own door left open most nights, waiting with bated breath for something to happen in the middle of the evening while everyone else is asleep. It seems impossible even with that sort of vigilance that they might have missed something.

Yet here they are.

"We were so wrong."

Denki looked towards Sero in confusion. He'd straightened in his chair and he seemed a lot more aware than he had even a few minutes ago. Mina sat down, closer to him, rubbing Sero's arm.

"Wrong about what?" Mina asked.

"Everything!"

The shout caught several of their classmate's attention. Denki shushed Sero, putting his finger to his mouth while smiling apologetically at everyone. Midoriya already looked close to tears and he was sure none of this was helping anyone.

"Hey now, everyone's pretty shaken, that's probably not the best..." Denki tried.

"Everything that we assumed about Bakugou... about his nightmares,

was wrong,” Sero hissed.

“What are you saying?” Kirishima whispered, looking utterly heart broken.

Denki gripped the front of his own jacket, looking from Sero to Mina to Kirishima to the rest of their classmates, all deadly silent as they eavesdropped on the conversation. He winced as he realized that Bakugou would be pretty upset with them, talking about his nightmares like this around everyone else.

“I’m saying he was never *having* nightmares!” Sero yelled. “He’s sick! Like... his whole chest is freakin’ infected with something!”

“No man, we’ve seen him change...” Denki protested. “Tonight we saw him change. There wasn’t anything there.”

Sero looked frustrated.

“And I’m saying he was *fine* one second and then the next he was being attacked. He was... it was weird! Okay? We were on the mission and he was acting weird, but he was fine. He was doing his ridiculous flips and destroying robots left and right and then he started checking his phone... I’m saying he knew something was coming! He freakin’ knew and he left us ‘cause he knew something was going to happen and then it did!”

“What kind of infection?” Kirishima cut in. “You’re saying...”

“All right! Listen up!”

Denki jumped out of his skin as they all turned to Aizawa Sensei, looking more haggard and tired than usual. The red of his eyes practically overtaking the white.

“We have a situation and I’m going to need everyone’s cooperation in this.” Aizawa told them, his voice showing none of the exhaustion.

“Oh shit,” Denki muttered.

There went every delusion that things weren’t as bad as everyone seemed intent on making it.

“Our plans this evening... had nothing to do with your training simulation.” Aizawa admitted, looking them all in the eyes as he scanned the bus over.

Of course. Another lie for their 'best interest' or 'motivation.' He tried not to let the touch of bitterness echo too loudly in his chest, but it was hard when one of his friends was sitting in front of him, traumatized with another of his friend's blood all over him.

"We were made aware that Bakugou might be being harassed or attacked in some way," Aizawa began, but was interrupted by a burst of shouts from the class. Eyes began to glow red and the man's hair raised in agitation. "Enough! LISTEN!"

Class 1A quieted, though most still looked ready to put up arms.

"We suspected the incidents were happening at night, in the dorm rooms where surveillance is prevented under privacy law, so we sought to survey what was going on under monitored supervision."

"But..." Momo spoke up from up front, sounding confused. "If he was being hurt or harassed then... wouldn't the person be aware we're out of the dorms... if another student or..." she grimaced. "If a teacher was performing such a deed then they would know..."

"We believe and now have confirmed that it is a Villain with a long-range quirk. Able to perform their agenda from far away."

"Is it the League of Villains?!" Iida demanded, glancing at Midoriya who had been unusually quiet since they'd gotten onto the bus. "Has Bakugou been targeted again?"

Denki sparked. Lightning running along every inch of his skin. He brought his arms up against his chest, brought his feet together as Sero stumbled back from him. He felt his hair rise from the current. He had to get himself under control. But all he could see was Bakugou arriving at the dorms, eyes downcast and scarily silent, his first glimpse of the blonde since being kidnapped because he'd chosen to follow the rules. To not go after his friend.

"Can you open a window?" He grit out to Kirishima.

The redhead nodded shakily, pulling up the metal frame Denki couldn't touch right now. The moment the cold air hit them in the face, he threw his hand out and a shot of electricity beamed harmlessly outwards, crackling in the air. No one said anything, not even Tsuyu who looked ready to tip over in hibernation. Instead she scrounged up a weak, understanding smile. Aizawa's eyes linger on him and there's a promise that they will be talking later about what just happened, but for now he turns back to his classmates.

“The situation is... complicated, to say the least, but I will try to break it down as simply as possible,” Aizawa said carefully. Too carefully. Denki knew that kind of word play. The kind that said the person was trying not to give something away. To not let loose too much information. “While we don’t know exactly what type of quirk is being used on Bakugou, we are fairly certain that he has been silenced. He cannot communicate what is going on in any way, written, verbal or physical.”

“Wait a minute,” Denki whispered, glancing at Sero’s startled face, at Kirishima and Mina’s sudden sick looking pallor. “Hold on! Are you saying this has been...”

Bakugou had been too quiet for months.

Everyone knew that.

He could see the wave of realization beginning to sink in across the bus. Like too much electricity running along a circuit breaker before the mini explosion across the circuit board. Bits of smoke and darkness surrounding them.

“How long has this been going on?!” Denki demanded.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you!” Sero snapped. “The whole time we’ve been in the dorms this has been going on! From the freaking start! He bit his tongue tonight Kami! Because he was having some kind of seizure on the ground ‘cause he wasn’t able to put his mouth guard in! Just like all those months ago, a few weeks after we moved into the dorms, remember?”

“Seizure?” Denki said faintly.

“What’s this about a mouthguard?” Aizawa cut in, staring doggedly at them.

“Er...” Denki said guiltily, all eyes turning to him. “Recovery Girl didn’t mention it to you? Or Bakugo...”

“I wouldn’t be asking if she had,” Aizawa gave him a deadpan expression. “And you know very well Bakugou would not.”

“Bakugou couldn’t find his mouth guard and he ended up biting the tip of his tongue off in the middle of the night,” Sero spoke up, shooting Denki a look that said ‘not the time.’ “We thought he was just having really bad nightmares, but we were wrong. Sorry, Sensei,

if we knew it was something worse...”

“You should still have reported it to me.” They winced at the reprimand, not used to the anger in their teacher’s normally deadpan voice. “This is... much worse than we suspected.”

“And what have you suspected?” Iida demanded. “Or should I say how long have you suspected while we walked around unaware that one of our own was hurting?”

It was not the first time Iida called out a teacher for doing something wrong.

But it was the first where he sounded genuinely angry.

Aizawa nodded in acknowledgment.

“Right, that brings me to the second part of this problem and the reason why I now must inform you...” That was hella ominous. He felt Mina grab him around the arm, tugging him close and he went with her, huddling in to wait for the worse news on top of the shit news. “This silencing quirk in use seems to have... monitoring aspects to it. It knows when Bakugou tries to communicate to us, but it also seems to be aware of what is being communicated to Bakugou.”

“So you’re saying...” Momo said slowly, as if testing out the idea. “That if Bakugou becomes aware that we know then the Villain will become aware that we know.”

“You didn’t inform us because you didn’t want us to unintentionally harm Bakugou,” Iida finished, looking chastised.

Sero looked stricken.

“So I... this is all MY FAULT?!” Sero cried out. “The Villains know that we know because I... shit. Shit!”

Aizawa was across the bus in an instant, his hands on either side of Sero’s shoulders, holding strong.

“No. This was our fault. We sent the robot to separate you because we suspected that midnight was our time frame and we were getting too close. We intended to separate Bakugou from you lot, to give him an opportunity to find safety. We miscalculated. We misjudged. Most of all... we underestimated just how much all of you have improved. You pulled off some impressive moves there to get to Bakugou in time. A

bit reckless, but well-executed. If Bakugou had been in danger from the Cementos closing him in, then you would have saved him. Don't blame yourself for our mistakes."

Sero's shoulders were shaking.

"Hey..." Denki started.

But then Kirishima was there, pulling Sero into a full on hug.

"We need to make sure the Villains stay as in the dark as possible from this moment forward," Aizawa told all of them in the quiet that followed. "Which means no questioning Bakugou. No saying anything of importance in front of Bakugou. If you don't think you can manage that then you will not be allowed to see Bakugou, is that clear?"

A chorus of 'Yes Sensei' went along the bus.

"We should have worked with you," Aizawa continues. "We believed it was better to keep as many people in the dark as possible, now it is clear that was a mistake. We could have coordinated this better. Ensured smoothness of a plan rather than trying to calculate it. All of you are becoming fine heroes and we should have treated you as such."

"As it stands," Aizawa continued. "We can only move forward from here. If there is anything that any of you have noticed, no matter how small, that has been out of character or odd, then I want you to report it to me. The Villains working from the shadows have gone above and beyond to keep things quiet... to keep Bakugou quiet and if we want to beat him then we need to work together."

There was a roar of agreement from all sides.

But.

Denki noticed Aizawa hadn't actually answered Iida's question about the League of Villains involvement. But what were the chances that a different villain was targeting their friend? That someone other than the scary guy with the hands had developed an obsession with the blonde?

Who had that kind of shit luck?

Chapter End Notes

Oh man, it feels weird to finally get to this chapter. I wrote the Doctor's scene when I was still drafting this piece. To get the explanation on paper and make sure everything made sense. To actually see it come to fruition is just plain weird, but I only had to update it a little bit for 1) Canon chapters coming out and 2) For my own newer scenes I didn't know I was going to be writing.

I'm sure seeing the relaxed nature of the Doctor was pretty off-putting as each time we're in Katsuki's head he's like a nightmare come to life. I wanted that HUGE difference though. As its Cannon that Doctor Tsubasa is the grandfather of Katsuki and Midoriya's childhood friend as well as Midoriya's doctor, I wanted to see some of that familiarity come out here where the Doctor, of course, remembers the kids, but the kids (being 4-6 during this time) are much less likely to remember that they even know this guy. As the kid, Tsubasa, seems to no longer be around during their Middle School days, it's safe to say that something definitely happened there (I'm well aware of the fandom theory that the kid got Nomu'd but I'm not convinced the Doctor would do that to his own grandson). Also, I think All For One as a possibility of being Midoriya's dad is a Red Herring. I think Horikoshi is purposefully pulling our legs here because the man has thus far subverted all stereotypes in the genre.

- 1) Making the Bully turn out to be the other protagonist and have him show genuinely growth
- 2) Using Ururaka to make fun of girl stereotypes about girls not being taken seriously in fights such as in the Bakugou vs. Ururaka
- 3) Paying such rapt attention to Mental health instead of using it as a means to garner jokes
- 4) Giving the stereotype hero (All Might) so much depth and attention and character development instead of the vague mentorship that most Manga's do.
- 5) Mineta, the perve, being constantly called out by his classmates and other characters rather than showing it to be a 'normal' boy thing but rather the terrible thing that it is.

Horikoshi seems to be constantly throwing in stereotypes almost for the SOLE PURPOSE to subvert them. So I'm definitely not sold on the Darth Vader thing that's been heavily hinted at here. I don't know how he's going to mock this trope, but I'm definitely here for it.

Back to discussing the chapter though:

That's right folks! Katsuki was just as deceived as everyone else! Unreliable narrator.

Its been really funny to see people reviewing about the Doctor and Rheina's overpowered quirks all the while knowing that everything in the story was designed to literally HIDE their biggest weaknesses.

The Doctor can create bodies and organs... Nomu but can't do much with them because the mind is basically destroyed in the process. So overpowered weapons with limited thinking ability.

Meanwhile Rheina can pull the mind from a body and put it in objects to control but the moment she stops using her quirk they return to the original body and the puppet becomes useless and if the original body is destroyed then the mind simply... disintegrates into nothing.

This is also why the John head transportation works on Katsuki [and only Katsuki] from so far away because while the Nomu body is at U.A, his original body is literally feet away from the Doctor at all times.

Anyways, I hope I haven't destroyed you guys with this reveal, but I need you guys to know this before we can move forward in the story for the last ten chapters.

There's still a few more secrets to be revealed and a few more questions that need to be answered for Katsuki. For everyone else... well obviously this is just the start of them discovering what the hell is going on.

And the climax for this story is going to be epic.

Next Chapter: Handbook of the Fucked Written by the Damned

Katsuki and the teachers POV with some Bakusquad love

Handbook of the Fucked Written by the Damned

Chapter Summary

Kirishima finds a book, Aizawa earns grey hairs, and Mina has a moment

Chapter Notes

Guys... this chapter got waaaaay too long. I actually had to cut out some scenes because it was getting to be like 13,000 words, as it stands, its still a little past 9,000.

Chapter 17: Handbook of the Fucked Written by the Damned

Katsuki choked on the tube in his mouth. He yanked at the chains binding his wrists. The feel of slime sliding along his skin as he struggled. All too similar to the sludge Villain, to the tar like substance the Doctor used, choking him from the inside out, that All for One used. His toes slide against glass as he kicked at the tube.

A distant part of his brain told him that he was panicking.

Another part told him this wasn't real.

It was a nightmare. Concocted from too many times being taken hostage and too many Villains taking an unhealthy liking to him. It wasn't real. He was probably still in the... he concentrated. Where had he been?

Training.

The USJ.

He was fine. Relatively. He was free. Somewhat. Not really. But freer than this. He was with friends. Who he's probably just traumatized by seizing on the fucking ground like that. He wasn't here. This wasn't real. Katsuki sucked in air. It tasted like plastic. His arms were stiff and in pain, everything hurt. The Doctor had done his creepy leering thing and yup, the clique lights flickering in the freaky clique mad scientist lab, he hoped his nightmares didn't reflect the depths of his

imagination because it was all a little too one-dimensional repetition.

And Katsuki Fucking Bakugou was anything but one-dimensional.

His feet hit the side of the glass and he concentrated on trying to get his muscles to relax. This was fine. This was dandy. He'd wake up in a few minutes. HE'D WAKE UP IN A FEW MINUTES.

'WAKE UP!'

The Nomu's were swaying back and forth. Wings and knuckles touching the ground in their chains. One of them turned to him. It was the female Nomu, its black claws clinking as it lifted its hand towards him, moving slowly to the end of the chain. The vague feminine features of hips and something resembling a bosom beneath plated grey skin could be seen. It stared at Katsuki, a long trail of drool falling out of its mouth as it tilted its head.

He blinked in the water, but everything was blurry, not quite clear through the greenish thick liquid. The Nomu's tendency to stare at him had always been weird, but they'd never moved closer to him. Katsuki jerked back a bit as the creatures pulled against the chain, reaching out its hand, but only the very tip of its nails touched the glass.

Katsuki blinked hard as he watched the nail move in a very specific manner.

Okay.

This was new.

Over and over again, tracing the glass lightly in first a circular motion before going downwards and to either side, like an arrow cutting through a circle. It gnashed its teeth, jaw snapping as it shook its head, like a dog. Its three eyes swiveling around for a moment before all of them concentrated on him, stretching out farther a single finger pressed up against the surface, black nail clicking harshly against the encasement.

Click. Click. Click.

Jaw snapping. A long tongue lolling out, its mouth moving slowly.

“...kill you.”

It put its hand to its heart.

Before its claw pressed against the glass again. Click. Click. Clicking away.

“I Kiiiiiiiill yOu.”

Katsuki jerked back, wheezing as he tried to take a full breath of stale air while distancing himself as far as possible.

Fuuuuuuuck. Fuck.

Click. Click. Click.

The Nomu was right up against the glass now, its eyes all focused on him. His skin crawled as it opened up its mouth to reveal black sharp teeth. His bare feet hit the glass, pushing him up against the other side.

"Again?" He heard the Doctor mutter.

And then the female Nomu was screaming.

His eyes snapped open.

Katsuki woke up with a sharp gasp, coughing and choking as hands held him in place. His body seized and owwwwwww. Fuck. Pain. Fuck. He must have fallen asleep while the Doctor was at work. Fuck.

Cold sweat colds every inch of his skin but whether its from the Quirkimorbus or the fucking nightmare, he has no idea. Probably both. He clenches down on his mouth guard, trying to breathe through his nose and get his bearings. Fresh air. Not stale. Blankets under him not green liquid around him. Ceiling above him, not a lab.

Where was his music? He always remembers to put his music in beforehand. Did it fall out?

He wheezed as he tried to orientate himself, but the pain was overriding everything like it did every night. A wrinkled hand touched his head. Who? Who was here? Soft lips. His eyes rolled into the back of his head.

Shota felt faint. Like a rookie coming onto his first rescue scene minutes too late to help anyone. He watched as the red eyes rolled back into his skull in unconsciousness, the spasm of pain that wracked his body as he went under again.

“He’s dying,” Chiyo told him... them. Present Mic, Nezu and Toshinori had all followed into the clinic. Waiting with bated breath for her diagnostic. “All of his organs- all of them, they are deteriorating. His bones and muscles are breaking down. I can hardly keep up with the damage being wrought upon him.”

“They are aware that we know,” Nezu hissed. “How long can you keep him alive?”

“I... I’m not sure. This has been ongoing since I was brought to him forty minutes ago. It’s slow enough that I should be able to handle it for a few days, but...”

She left her words unfinished, looking up at them with true fear in her eyes.

It had taken them three days to mount a rescue last time something had happened to Bakugou and they’d had a hell of a lot more info going into it than now.

“I’m not sure that they do know,” Shota said with a heavy heart.

“Explain,” Nezu demanded, sounding more like a rattlesnake than any of the animals that made up his design.

“Sero mentioned that Bakugou must have been having seizures this whole time as Bakugou has been wearing a mouth guard to bed for months and he doesn’t think this is the first time he’s had seizures,” Shota relayed unsteadily.

“You think *this* has been happening every night?” Toshinori gasped out in disbelief.

“This damage is extensive,” Chiyo breathed out. “I don’t think...”

“We’ll know in a few hours’ time,” Shota cut in. “If it stops... if the damage begins to heal...”

“Then we know this is a nightly occurrence,” Nezu finished. “But if he

continues to decline for the rest of the day then we know that we've been caught and that we have a limited time frame to save him. Either scenario is awful."

"We need to contact Naomasa as soon as possible then, tell him that we need a red alert on this," Toshinori said quickly, already pulling out his phone. "We have other Doctor's with healing quirks available too. I'll call them in so that you can rest Chiyo."

The U.A official healer nodded in accent.

This had gone downhill so quickly.

Cementos hadn't said a word since they'd gotten back. No one was blaming the Pro-hero. They'd all underestimated the kids... again. Their response time to Bakugou heading off had been far better than any of them suspected and no one had planned for Sero to launch himself into a crack in the earth that was closing so quickly.

Reckless.

Brave, but reckless.

He covered his face with his hands.

"Aizawa." He turned to Nezu, the principle twitching angrily. "I'm sorry for miscalculating. Midnight is with the children right now, I know, but I believe they would feel... less mentally strained if you were to take over for now. Keep your com on."

Shota stiffened at the command. Turning to Bakugou whose back arched in pain even in unconsciousness and a choked scream passed through his lips. He couldn't... he couldn't leave him like this.

"I..."

"I'll go."

Shota glanced at Toshinori. The man marched over to the bed and brushed his fingers through the boy's hair, bending over and whispering something Shota couldn't hear, but that made Nezu's ears flatten for the briefest of seconds.

"You shouldn't make promises like that, even if he can't hear you," Nezu reprimanded.

The retired hero straightened.

"I don't make promises I don't intend to keep," the man growled out, matching the principle head on. "Retired, I very well might be, but I am still a hero and Bakugou is..."

One of his kids.

It was clear to see the unintended favoritism he held for Midoriya and how over the last eight months or so that favoritism had extended to Bakugou. Though the man cared deeply for all of the students, he'd taken special care where these two were concerned.

All Might didn't say that though.

"I will always put my life on the line for the sake of my students," the man said instead, the black of his eyes so wide it seemed to take up the entirety of his face. "Always."

"Go then," Nezu said quietly, a touch of steel in his voice. "And know that every teacher here is prepared to put their life on the line, but you still must be cautious above all else."

He's never heard the two disagree so firmly on a matter. He'd never heard Nezu go so cold. The principle must truly be worried about losing Bakugou then. Shota collapsed in the seat next to Bakugou, feeling more than seeing Present Mic grabbing his shoulder. A thought struck him then.

"Wait!" Toshinori stopped where he was at Shota's voice. "Check Bakugou's room. Every drawer. Every nook. He can't have... If he's been dealing with this the whole time... without being able to say anything then there has to be something he was doing to cope."

Chiyo's head whipped around, looking at Shota carefully.

"Self-medicating," she whispered. "Even if it's just regularly pain pills, chances are he's been taking too many. I need to know what kind and how much before I can add anything else on top of it. Check under the bed and in the bed frame too."

Looking grim, Toshinori nodded, heading out the door.

"This is inhumane," Chiyo whispered. "And to what end? Why would the League, or anyone for that matter, want or need to harm a child like this? Harassing him, sending him messages, it was an awful thought, but at least there was an idea of converting him that made some form of sense, but this?! In all my years I've never witnessed

such senseless brutality.”

Shota couldn't help but agree.

He'd been trying for weeks to figure out why the League would continue to pursue Bakugou even after everything. Did Tomura Shigaraki blame Bakugou for All For One's capture? Was this all some form of revenge? Or was there something bigger going on here? He'd long suspected that there was something about Bakugou that the League needed, not just wanted, but genuinely needed for their plans. Why else mount such a large-scale attack? It couldn't just be to damage the views of the people on heroes.

There was something they were missing here.

But what?

Returning to the dorms, being ushered in by Midnight, Eijiro knows he's not staying here. His classmates walk around like an earthquake has just hit, but there are no casualties and they aren't needed for the cleanup crew. Like they know they need to be doing *something* but what that thing is slips through all of their fingers.

Most of his classmates take the couches in the common area, but Eijiro goes up to his dorm room and grabs a pillow before barging into Bakugou's room. He scans the books piled high on the desk and shelves, the papers for essays Aizawa Sensei had said aren't due until after winter break. The laptop open with more tabs for references than Eijiro uses in an entire semester. There are several charts on the walls around the room... one covering laws specific to heroes, one detailing the mechanics of his gauntlets, a few outdated hero rankings that have been marked with handwritten notes, a large map across the back wall of Japan, separated into hero districts and so many notations across the thing that one could barely make out the original lines.

“An absolute nerd,” Eijiro says fondly to the open air.

He goes to the desk and eyes the pile of books. There's one Bakugou's been taking with him to classes, reading in his spare time. It was blue

with silver lettering, a few black sticky notes- who even sold black sticky notes? That he always used to keep important bits in mind later.

Eijiro spots it sitting under the mouse and his lips twitch at the site. Bakugou's going to be bored in the hospital. He just knows it. His friend is going to be fine. He's not going to... He pushes the thought down. Eijiro is going to bring him his book and Bakugou will be able to do something productive that won't hurt him physically or strain him.

And Bakugou will huff and puff, but he'll pick the book up and give him the look that says 'you're stupidly considerate but I appreciate that.' Bakugou will pop the book open, but he'll go to the start of it, where he's highlighted the living daylights out of the poor textbook and he'll say 'bring the other idiots in here. You don't got to know all of it, but there are a few important bits.' And they'll be forced to hear Bakugou lecture them on who knows what that seems entirely pointless but actually does turn out to be super useful.

It seems like Bakugou always has a new book every few days or so and he wants to roll his eyes at how ridiculous some of the random topics he reads on are. Just this month he's seen Bakugou reading 'How Quirks that Create Chemicals React With the World' which he'd forced Mina to read chunks of (much to her chagrin), 'Engineering Basics and Applications' and a sci-fi book called Sky Without Stars.

'You're such a dork,' Kaminari had teased one night awhile ago.

Bakugou had flipped a page in his book and without looking up had flicked a quarter that had hit poor Kaminari directly between the eyes.

'A dork that can kick your ass any day of the week, Sparky, don't fucking forget it.'

'Jeez! It was a compliment! Don't get your knickers in a bunch,' Kaminari whined.

Eijiro rubs at his eyes, trying to blink away the wetness. Stupid. He was being stupid. Bakugou wasn't dead and he was going to be fine. Just fine. Eijiro could be of better use to everyone if he'd just... pull himself together. Bakugou didn't need people who were acting like blubbering idiots!

He needed him to be strong!

That in mind, Eijiro grabs Bakugou's laptop, packing it away in his bag and he goes to grab the blue and silver book...

His eye catches the title.

'Managing Panic Attacks and Stress.'

Oh.

Eijiro falls onto the bed, his fingers brushing the title as his mind blanks. He opens the book to Bakugou's first black sticky note halfway through the third chapter with 'Re-experiencing symptoms' highlighted in yellow and more than half of the items below circled in red. Frightening Thoughts. Bad dreams. Cold Sweats. Fevers. Racing Heart.

Oh.

He goes to the next section, finding 'arousal and reactivity symptoms' with the entire section circled and EVERY symptom heavily underlined. Being easily startled. Feeling tense or 'on edge.' Having difficulty sleeping and/or having angry outbursts. Eijiro goes to the next highlighted section... Cognition and mood symptoms; trouble remembering key features of the traumatic event, negative thoughts about oneself or the world, distorted feelings like guilt or blame, loss of interest in enjoyable activities.

He feels sick as he goes through the book, Bakugou had only been halfway through but there was a lot more highlighted in this book than in any of the others. There's notes too. Which is odd. Bakugou normally writes out his notes in his notebooks, not in the book itself, writing page numbers if he thinks he might need to go back to the book.

Here though, there's red ink across several sections of the book.

In bright red ink above a section on nightmares Bakugou wrote: 'Slightly different reoccurring nightmare?' 'Same Location.' 'Doctor acts a little different each time.' What Doctor was Bakugou talking about? He flips through the book, finding more little notes here and there.

And then he sees them.

Nomu.

Eijiro stares at the drawings across the book's margins. Black Nomu, like the one Endeavor fought. Dozens of them sketched out across the pages. Winged Nomu. Ones with dozens of eyes. Rock looking Nomu. Scaled. Long armed. Whip like hair. Almost obsessively drawn.

Oh man. Bakugou...

What happened to you?

The ghastly images fade slowly as Bakugou went further into the book. The notes turn to stress relief tactics, though the way they've been almost angrily crossed out with a black marker makes Eijiro feel like they'd failed.

There's a section in the book that's been entirely ripped out. Something he's definitely never seen Bakugou do. When Eijiro goes to the front of the book, the index tells him that the ripped-out section is 'communication tactics.'

"While we don't know exactly what type of quirk is being used on Bakugou, we are fairly certain that he has been silenced. He cannot communicate what is going on in any way; written, verbal or physical."

Eijiro swallowed hard. To hear what they suspected to be the situation was one thing but to see physical evidence... Tension dripped out of these pages. He can practically see Bakugou pouring over this book, trying to figure things out all by himself. All alone and trapped.

He wipes away at the wetness on his cheeks again.

Crinkling catches his ear, he pauses and flips to the end of the book, where there's papers folded and tucked between the cover and authors flap. He pulls them out and opens them, a list of locations spread across the paper and its... there are notes absolutely devouring every inch of it in tiny print. Places have been crossed off and... there's a word that's repeated over and over again... **underground**. Calculations written out for hypothetical lab space?

He thinks back to Bakugou, covered in mud like he'd been outside all night. Ashido looking at him with wide eyes as he told them what happened and her harsh response: *"It's been proven that Villains can get to us, get to Bakugou, and there's an endless amount of quirks out there. Types we've never seen before. Whose to say something didn't happen?"*

This.

Eijiro covers his eyes.

Bakugou never quits. The stubborn idiot has been fighting this whole time. He feels himself hiccup as he stares down at the notes. His best friend is... absolutely freaking unbelievable.

Bakugou is still moving forward. Even when no one was aware that there was a fight to be had, when he was alone in all of this for months and months... he never wavered or stopped. Even when he's been suffering so badly, he'd been dragging one foot in front of the other.

He really was a shining example of everything a hero was.

Eijiro stood up.

Right. If Bakugou could plod through the blizzard and snow to forge a trail for all of them then Eijiro Kirishima could damn well follow it!

"Oh, sorry, did I get the wrong room?"

Eijiro looked up to see All Might looking at him tiredly from the doorway.

"No, no, you didn't," Eijiro told him, marching over with the book. "Bakugou's been fighting his whole time! He's not..." He shoved the book into the man's large hands, closing his fingers around the spine. "We have to save him. He's already done a lot all by himself and we have to catch up!"

A light sparked in his teacher's eyes.

"You're damn right," the man whispered.

"This..."

Shota sat up more thoroughly at Chiyo's strained voice.

"What?"

"I do not believe we triggered his death by the League. I think young Sero was correct."

This was... good news, but at the same time it was the worst thing Shota could imagine. His eyes strayed to the clock on the wall, 3:45 am reading like a demented condemnation of all his failures. Almost four hours of this torture.

"It has stopped. Completely. All signs of decay are reversing." Chiyo told him, sitting back. "He'll be able to get up and move around in a few hours though I doubt he'll want to."

"Then that's it," Shota said darkly. "This... *this* is how they've been attacking him. Every single night."

"The inhumanity of such an act," Chiyo whispered. "To a child no less."

Sero discovering Bakugou seemed to have not alerted the League then. Maybe as long as Bakugou did not try to communicate what was going on things would be okay. This suggested it really was intent behind the power of the quirk being used on Bakugou.

As long as they made Bakugou believe he hadn't been caught, the villains too would remain in the dark.

The thought left an awful taste in his mouth.

And then the door opens up and All Might walks in. There's a book in one hand and in the other a bag, filled to the brim with medicine that is decided **not** over the counter drugs.

'Of course.'

Shota has a lock of gray hair. He tucks it behind his ear to keep it hidden, but oh, its there. It's there and it hadn't been there a few months ago and he feels entirely justified in blaming Bakugou for this. There were a few strands that probably belonged to Midoriya, but he felt secure in blaming Bakugou for the majority of it.

‘How the fuck is this kid still alive?’

Oh, he was happy about that, but the long list of ways this child should be in the ground already was alarming him to no end. There were five different highly dangerous drugs in front of him that had been stashed in the kid’s drawer and each one of them was causing his heart to stutter in a different horrible way.

‘How did he get his hands on these?!’

Bakugou Katsuki, child genius, up and coming hero, and drug lord.

Apparently.

He hardly believed what he was seeing. He hadn’t gotten some of *these* pain killers after he’d had his arm fractured in ten places and his face used as a mop for the floor. Did he rob a pharmacy?!

Beside him, Toshinori frowned down at the needle injection for one of the medicines.

“I’m pretty sure I’m on this one,” the retired hero muttered.

Shota buried his face in his hands.

“So I’ve been thinking,” Hizashi said, Shota didn’t look up, but he could see the clock between his fingers reading **4:50** on the wall just behind his friend’s head. Had it really been only a few hours since things went to such utter shit? “Do you think the kid’s known since the start?”

Shota buries his head further into his knees as he mulls the words over. He can hear Toshinori shifting beside him, clearly uncomfortable. He tries to think back, to the moment in the police station where he’d met Bakugou after he’d been rescued from the League of Villains. He hadn’t made it in time for the questioning. He hadn’t been there as the Healers had looked his student over.

He’d made it in time to the police station to see his student with his knees pulled up in a chair, half asleep as he waited for his parents to arrive. He’d been quiet. Reserved. There was so much Shota had blamed on the trauma of being kidnapped, but it could have been something else entirely.

It could have been that Bakugou was already aware the heroes had failed.

That he wasn't being rescued at all.

"Surely not," Toshinori says softly, voice hopeful. "He's been fighting for a while, obviously from the books notes, but the whole time?"

Shota is inclined to agree, but in the grand scheme of things though...

"It might be better if he had known," Shota says, pulling his head up. At Toshinori's sharp look of disapproval and Hizashi's expectant look, he explains. "What do you think is worse? To know from the start that you haven't been saved? Or to allow yourself to believe you are safe only to figure out that it was all a lie? That despite all the effort made, it was all a waste because the Villains have been one step ahead this whole time?"

"Five months," Hizashi whispers. "It makes you want to scoop the kid up and lock him away in a tower or something."

Shota snorted.

"Like he'd allow that... even if it would keep him safe."

"But it wouldn't, would it?" Toshinori broke in, voice desolate. "What sort of power do they hold that can harm the kid while here? We knew something was going on, but this?!"

They'd all been caught off guard.

Torture. Transportation. Silencing. This was insane on the power spectrum. It was definitely All For One's men, though it was hard to imagine Shigaraki, the man child that he was, executing such an elaborate and *subtle* plan. It also went against his Motive Operandi. He was a large-scale kind of guy even when targeting a single person.

There had been so many better ways they could have kidnapped Bakugou that wouldn't have led to one-third of their team being captured. Bakugou walked home alone every day from U.A to his home. He was anti-social and no one at that time, outside of Kirishima, walked out of the school with him. It would have been easy to capture him then, to not give away the descriptions of their team, to move in the shadows.

Shota shudders.

If they had not been so reckless, so foolhardy in proving a point, then it would have been days before the school found out. The Bakugou's

would have gone to the police. The police would have insisted on waiting 24 hours, that Bakugou might just be doing teenage shenanigans or that his phone might have died.

But anyone who knows Bakugou knows that even above his impatience and rough exterior, the kid follows the rules to a ridiculous degree. His assignments were always pristine, on time, well versed. He arrived early for class. He followed every Dorm rule to a T. He kept his room immaculate, tutored his classmates. Cooked dinner for the entire class on one occasion. He was in bed by 8:30 (he winced at that one).

The point being that despite all appearance, Katsuki Bakugou was not rebellious in any sense of the word. He was not a rule breaker. Hell, he'd once seen Kaminari toss a soda can away, miss the trash and keep on walking, and the threat Bakugou had towered over him to pick it up had been both violent and creative.

'You're supposed to be a fucking shining example of keeping the planet safe you piece of trash. Now pick yourself up or I'll toss you out!'

He can practically see Mitsuki Bakugou arguing with the police, insisting that her son wasn't the type. They'd only raise their brows at her, eyeing the Sport's Festival photo no doubt in his profile (or any other photo really). The kid definitely looked the 'punk' part. As the situation would have devolved from there, he imagined it wouldn't have been much longer before the Midoriya's would have gotten involved too.

His problem child would have called the other students.

Back then, he's not sure how many of them *would* have immediately known something was wrong. They might have listened because it was Midoriya, but many of them hadn't known Bakugou well enough then. And then... after the police and his students found out and days had gone by. That's when he would have been contacted.

They might never have found Bakugou at all.

Shigaraki had wanted to make a point though.

In stealing his student right out of the hands of Pro-heroes while surrounded by classmates he'd anted to demonstrate to the world the weakness in the system of Heroes. To show the world how useless it was to rely on them.

“Nezu believes it has to be the person with the tar transportation quirk,” Hizashi said, trying to keep his voice quiet, but not quite managing it. “The quirk All For One was trying to hide.”

That’s right.

His students had told him that All For One had taken credit for the tar transportation, but that had been proven false when Dabi had attacked with Nomu and escaped with the same type of quirk. It had confirmed the idea that there were many others outside of the League involved with one for all, but it also confirmed something else.

All For One had purposefully deceived those around him in order to hide the identity of this one individual. As far as he’d known, it had only been the League and a captured Bakugou which meant one of two things 1) All For One had wanted to deceive his own subordinates about the presence of this man or 2) He’d known from the start that Bakugou was going to be ‘rescued’ and had wanted the boy to supply false information to the hero community.

And considering the fact that Bakugou had been, what Nezu suspects, physically connected to a Villain beforehand, it was looking more and more like the latter. At every corner it appeared they’d fallen perfectly into their trap and Bakugou had been forced to pay the price over and over and over again.

“Hiding in the shadows waiting to strike,” Toshinori said forlornly. “Young Midoriya and the others aren’t going to take this lying down. We should discuss how we’re going to handle that.”

Shota felt his eyebrow twitch at the reminder.

“Couldn’t be avoided. We couldn’t have them demanding answers of Bakugou and unintentionally putting his life at more risk or giving away information we don’t want the Villains to have.”

“That could still happen. The kids aren’t subtle and that’s coming from me,” Hizashi sighed. “Maybe we could limit the interaction? Claim medical reasons and keep visiting hours strict.”

“That might work for a few days,” Shota said evenly. But what if they couldn’t resolve this within a few days? This had been going on for months and there was no obvious solution. The dirt sample locations were being investigated even as they spoke.

He popped open the book again, marveling at the details and the

worrying notations within the book. He hadn't been able to read over everything yet, but the vast amount of analysis written in parts of the book was worrying.

"What did Nezu say about the Nomu here?"

"He thinks Bakugou must have seen them when he was transported. They all look like the elite kind." Toshinori told them tiredly. "There's dozens inside the book. The information on the location though... that's a bit more concrete. He really..." The Pro-heroes voice stuttered, going soft. "He's really put a lot of investigation into it. He's narrowed down a list of seventeen locations to five possible areas using, quite frankly, advanced mathematics having only a vague idea of how large the place he was taken to was. It's mind-bogglingly impressive."

"Have the team's been contacted?" Shota asked. He'd handpicked the underground heroes and trusted them to be stealthy, but if there was really this many Nomu's at the location then they'd need a lot more heavy hitters involved which meant involving daytime heroes. He grimaced. Which meant that they would have to hit all five locations at the same time to stop them from accidentally giving anything away in their blundering.

It also meant they were, essentially, going to be dealing with a hostage situation with a 'no negotiations' mindset. This... Doctor, that Bakugou keeps mentioning in the book. The one he's been having nightmares about... he suspected that this was the Villain Bakugou had been forcefully connected to.

Chiyo stepped back into the room, scanning them tiredly before her eyes landed on the book.

"I'm going to need to lighten the sleep I have on Bakugou which means it's no longer safe to speak here. Get that book out of here and please, restrain your students, most of them are standing outside my clinic's doors, demanding to be let in."

Right.

Why was he not surprised?

"Guess that's my cue," Hizashi muttered, stretching as he stood, swiping the book from Shota's hands as he moved out of the room. "Mind giving me back up, All Might? This bunch is a bit too wild for me alone."

“Yes, of course.”

When he opens his eyes, there's a moment where he *feels* them beginning to roll back into his head. He digs his nails into his thigh and forces his eyes open too wide while he wheezes breath into his lungs.

'Fuck that shit.'

His alarm is probably going off and his body is being a little bitch about it. That's all. Trying to give out on him when he's got shit to do and asses to kick. He flops over, trying to get his limbs to work with him this morning, get the feeling back through his veins and shake off the ache that always remains in the morning. Deku's pain tolerance was through the roof, but Bakugou felt he was quickly catching up to him on that front without all the fucking stupidity attached to it.

As always, his toes are unnaturally cold and his legs aren't listening to him as he tries to get his knees under him. That will go away faster as long as he keeps trying to move them, getting the blood to flow.

Something stabs him in the arm.

He winces and looks down and... what the crap? He flops back down as he stares at it tiredly. There's a needle in his arm attached to a bag. He follows it to the ceiling to the floor to the medical supplies everywhere. When was he taken to the clinic? Fuck. Did he lose a fight? It better not have been against Deku or Half and Half. Fuck.

No. No. No. That wasn't right. He knew what it felt to wake up after decking it out with one of those assholes and this wasn't it. This was the Quirimorbus. His head was pounding against his skull, something that always made it hard for him to think in the morning. Which is why he avoided everyone 'till he got his tea and could shake the Doctor's little mind fuck from his brain.

His pained wheeze stopped as his eyes wandered further around the room to come to a screeching halt on his teacher. Aizawa sat in the chair beside the medical bed, eyes boring into him like a demented

raccoon on a trash can caught in the beam of a flashlight.

'Fuuuuuck.' He'd pissed Aizawa off. Motherfucking Christ, what had he done? Bakugou wracked his brain, but it was still a canvas of white. Still reeling from his nightmare and the residue pain. Pissing Aizawa off was the last thing on shit he wanted to pull so how the fuck had he'd brought this onto himself?

Like a rusted guillotine, the sickle fell with a screech as his memories assaulted him.

'Sero.'

He opened his mouth to curse, but the words would not come. Motor functions all still being offline for him for a while. The second set of thoughts though was of startled surprise.

'Hey, lookie there, I'm still alive.'

What the fuck did that mean anyways? It was kind of funny, actually, in a morbid Tokoyami dark humor type of way, that the thought of him being alive was really fucking stressful. The anxious questions rolling in his head reminding him way too much of the shitty nerd this early in the fucking morning.

Right...

Deku had appeared out of nowhere last night like he always did just in the nick of time to be an utter pain in his ass and witness exactly what Katsuki didn't want him to see. The nerd had been crying all over him last night which meant he was going to have to deal with the fallout of *that*.

'Uhhhhh, I regret waking up.'

He was already way too stressed out to be less than 30 seconds into this mess. He wondered if it was too late to turn over and go back to sleep. Forget the mess that was his life for a few hours.

The Doctor hadn't kidnapped him and hadn't killed him so that meant... who the fuck knows. He was so done. Overcooked until even the tips were burned to shit. His coughed harshly, squinting away from the light to look directly at Aizawa.

"Is this..." Katsuki coughed harshly, turning his head into the pillow. Fuck. He sounded like a 70-year-old-smoker. "Is this the part where

we monologue about our... our feelings and problems... and everything gets magically better?" He coughed. "Because I've got a feeling... there ain't no amount of unicorn shit good enough to sprinkle on this crap fest."

...

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"Fair enough." There was the sound of something rattling though and Katsuki winced as Aizawa pulled a couple of orange pill bottles out of his bag. "We'll skip the emotional baggage if I'm satisfied with why you had these in your room."

His dad's pain meds.

Motherfucking shit balls.

"When did the seizures start?" Shota asks, meeting his student's tired eyes. "And why in the world did you think it was a good idea to take dangerous, high dosages of stolen pain medicine rather than going to Recovery Girl?"

That tinge of anger is real, but not meant for Bakugou. He sees how his student got that desperate. Hates it. Despises it. But he understands it. These things are dangerous though and Recovery Girl has said that they are dangerously addictive so when things are cleared up, when this is all over and they've saved him, Bakugou will need to be detoxed.

Bakugou doesn't say anything.

He looks away from Shota to stare at the wall and he curses as he realizes what might be going through his student's mind right now. The clock on the wall is fast approaching five in the morning. His student looks like absolute hell and he can't help but think of all the

mornings Bakugou had come in, looking like death warmed over and coveting a cup of coffee as he sunk into his seat.

He hates to push his student now. When he's so clearly exhausted and hurting, but Nezu was right. Bakugou is less likely to realize they know more than they should if they question him when he's like this.

"Bakugou," he calls out softly, trying desperately to soften the blow. "Where did you even get these?"

Bakugou closes his eyes for a long moment before turning to him, those sharp red eyes watching him too closely for someone whose shadows are longer than his own. When he speaks his voice sounds like he's been smoking for fifty years, his normally gravelly voice coming out in a rasping heap.

"My dad's cancer went into remission. We keep them around just in case." Bakugou shrugged. "I've only been taking the Percocet. I didn't react well to the other ones."

Shota flinches at those words, picturing the fifteen-year-old testing them out by himself in his dorm room. Having bad reactions. Dealing with all of that on his own. God damn it. He swallows and nods. At least... at least he wasn't mixing this shit. This could be a lot worse. A *lot* worse.

"So you've been taking a high-level pain medicine for seizures?" Shota says evenly. "Is there a reason you decided to hide you were having them? You could have died tonight, Bakugou."

His student stares at him with such deep resignation and lack of care that it sends shivers down his spine.

Time.

They needed to buy time, he reminds himself, that's why they are doing this.

"You've endangered your own life tonight and if you'd been out in the field, performing real tasks as a hero, you'd have endangered the lives of your teammates and the lives of civilians. Do you understand the severity of what happened tonight?"

"Are you..." Bakugou's breath hitched. "Are you expelling me?"

Every fiber of his being cringed at the very thought.

“On campus suspension,” Shota told him. “We’ll be contacting your parents, of course, but I’m sure they’ll be more than happy to agree as we’ll be performing medical exams with the best Doctors and Quirk Healers available to find a solution for these seizures...”

Bakugou’s face crumbles.

Shota stuttered to a stop.

The kid looked utterly heartbroken.

“This isn’t...” Shota swallowed, hesitating and hoping Bakugou would pick up on what he was really saying. “This isn’t the end of the world. We all want you to be safe and healthy and to make sure you’re taken care of. We *care* about you. We aren’t going to just... give up on you because the road ahead is more difficult than we thought. We all want to see you become the hero you’re destined to be.”

Bakugou tries to sit up.

Shota startles at the pain that lines his face.

“Hey, hey, now,” he reaches forward in alarm, but Bakugou doesn’t make it far, slumping back down and wheezing heavily. Shota grabs the cup of water and offers it to the kid who nods and takes sips gratefully, when he speaks, his voice is a little more smooth.

“Why...” Tired eyes look his way. “After all the shit I’ve pulled... why do you keep giving me more chances?”

Shota blinked slowly, sitting back in his seat and considering Bakugou for a long moment.

“You... picked a fight with the problem child on ground beta... outside of that, nothing that has happened this year has been your fault in any way, so I’m afraid you’ll have to enlighten me on this list you’ve surmounted in your mind.”

He knew, from what Toshinori has told him, that Bakugou blamed himself for All Might’s retirement so who knew what else this child had put on that list? One thing was sure, he was putting this kid’s ass in therapy as soon as fucking possible when this was all over.

His mind rolled back to his many offers to the kid about going to talk to someone and cringed at the futility and tension that must have caused. Not only that... but there was no way to know what these

Villains had been saying to Bakugou all these months.

Bakugou's eyes had gone tense and his arms were folding in front of him. His guard was going up tenfold and Shota sighed. He supposes he should be grateful that Bakugou had been honest about where he'd gotten the drugs, though it made the conversation that needed to take place with his parents that much more difficult.

"I..." Shota looked up to see Bakugou staring down pointedly at his lap. "You said on campus suspension but... my dad. He uh... he has something planned... I know... I don't deserve it, but... he was really excited about whatever it was."

His heart sinks and he closes his eyes.

"This isn't..." Shota has to swallow down repeating himself. "Kid, Bakugou, hiding being..." Tormented by Villains is on the tip of his tongue, but he bites down on the words. "Hiding being sick was stupid, but you haven't... you're misunderstanding me."

Toying the line of what he could say and couldn't was infinitely more difficult than he'd first imagined.

"We'll seeing how well you're doing in a few days, if everything is good, we'll figure something out, okay?" He finishes, standing up. "Get some rest. We'll talk more later."

"Don't..." Bakugou calls out as he turns to go. "My parents really don't need to get involved. They're... my dad's only recently started to get better and he won't handle it well."

"I'm afraid that's not an option, kid," Shota tells him as gently as he can. "They produced you, you know, they're probably a lot stronger than you give them credit for."

At the thin line of Bakugou's lips, he guesses the kid disagrees with him on that point. He remembers his first suspicions concerning the Bakugou's and there's something in his gut that says there's a lot there to unpack.

One thing after another, it seems.

He'll just have to figure out as he goes.

Mina hummed quietly to herself as she highlighted the important bits in her textbook. Green for dates and events that Midnight tended to emphasize a little too much to be a coincidence. Pink for history facts Momo seemed ‘absolutely positively ‘would I lie to you?’ sure’ would be on the next exam. Blue for things Iida claimed would be on the exam. Orange for ‘the important shit that you’re going to want to keep with you passed this fucking classroom,’ as Bakugou put it.

She bit her bottom lip hard, trying not to let the tears threatening spill have their way. She dashed them away and took in a few steadying breaths to force herself to calm down. Bakugou had forced her to learn these study habits. ‘If you need colors to remember shit than use the fucking rainbow, Horns.’

“You can go in now,” a gentle voice told her.

She looked up to see Midnight Sensei watching her carefully, leaning casually against the doorframe. Mina felt her lip wobble, clenching her jaw tight and standing up too fast, nearly dropping her highlighter.

Orange spread across her palm as she caught it.

She glanced at her friends. Asleep on the couch in the corner. Kaminari and Kirishima asleep against the head of the couch with Sero’s body draped over them, all awkward elbows and sharp knees. On the opposite side of the room, Todoroki was passed out against Midoriya on a recliner, their faces squished together in a comical fashion.

There was a line of accent chairs along the wall taken up by Iida, Ururaka, Tokoyami, Jiro and herself. She was the only one who’d won the battle against sleep this night though and despite how uncomfortable the chairs were they’d managed to fall asleep.

The rest of the class had taken to the floor at first before Present Mic forced them to go back to the dorms, stating they could come back after they’d gotten some proper rest in proper beds.

For a moment she considered waking them, at least Kirishima, but it was probably best if visitors were limited and if she woke Kirishima then Kirishima would wake everyone, even if unintentionally.

Standing was an unavoidable mistake. Her back ached and there was a crick in her neck she knew she'd be feeling all day. Her legs were numb and her feet tingling from new blood rushing into them. Nothing could have kept her sitting though and she wobbled her way determinedly into the room to spot red eyes watching her. Sweat so thick it caused his normally gravity-defying hair to lay flat on his head. Dark bags rings an unhealthy pallor, grime and dirt-smeared over every inch of him, and looking so tired she couldn't fathom how he was awake.

"Hey Blasty," she whispered.

She pulled herself over the medical railing and laid next to him, forcing him over like a dog taking up too much space on the bed. He put up about as much resistance, turning on his side and giving her a half-hearted glare, his arm flopping over her stomach. She forced her own arm under his head so, forcing him to lean more heavily on her.

He didn't resist or protest, his eyes glazed over and half-lidded.

'What have you gotten yourself into?' She wanted to ask. Her lips pressed tight together though, aware now that there was someone listening in. The thought made her shiver.

"Have I ever told you why I wanted to become a hero?" She asked. He didn't move. Didn't hum under his breath like he normally would when she started pestering him about something. She dragged her fingers through her hair, feeling the damp grossness of the recently sick. "When I was eight, I got separated from my mom in the mall, I don't know how long I wandered around, but I do remember my name being called over the intercom."

Bakugou's eyes closed and she felt his breath against her chest, but there was the tiniest squeeze of her wrist to tell her that he was still listening.

"A hero came," she told him. "He wore this over the top red and yellow costume and these goggles that were just... ridiculous in size. He had some kind of eye quirk. Anyways, he scooped me up and told me that he would make sure I got back to my parents and the crowd cheered and waved."

She took in a deep breath, trying to not let her voice hitch. She'd never told this story to anyone. Not even Kirishima.

"It took me a while to realize that we were heading towards the exit

and even when I figured that out, I still didn't understand. I had complete faith in superheroes and it never even crossed my mind to doubt what was going on."

Bakugou's eyes had widened, he still exhausted, but he was a little more alert.

"We were in the parking lot and he was trying to put me in his car when it finally clicked. I started screaming and hollering, throwing acid at him. He wrenched my arm out of its socket. After that I didn't fight back. Guess I was scared he'd hurt me worse."

She paused, staring up at the ceiling.

"And then he was just... gone. One second there and the next second just empty air. I was still in his car, laid out in the back seat holding my arm and I was so scared I couldn't move. Then she got there and... she didn't look anything like a hero. She looked so sloppy; her costume was too big for her, her hair looked like she'd braided it with mud and a crow's nest, she had these scary tattoos all over her body, monsters and like... grotesque body deformations in 3D. Real scary."

Mina smiled at the memory.

"It didn't get any better either. She picked me up and took me away from the car. Patted me on the head awkwardly and then just... stood there. The guy who'd been pretending to be a hero looked a mess. Like she'd beaten him within an inch of his life. His very skin was stitched together instead of being handcuffed. When the cops showed up, I remember them pulling her aside and reprimanding her for the rough treatment. She blew them off and came back to me and said 'Your good kid, right? Tough little thing like you. Stiffen that upper lip. Alright? You fought today and that's why I noticed you. I hardly did anything. You saved yourself. I was just here to witness it.'"

Mina paused.

Bakugou had fallen asleep. Out cold. She was pretty sure that if she shook him, he wouldn't notice at all. She continued on anyway, hoping the sound of her voice had been what soothed him to sleep finally.

"My parents were contacted and they came to grab me, crying and panicked and demanding answers and this hero, this rough, sloppy hero told them off for letting me wander. For not being careful enough. She bent down and she looked me in the eyes as the medics

fixed my arm she said ‘don’t ever lose that spirit.’ And everyone was so mad at her, you know? For not acting like a proper hero. She noticed me. Saved me. Made sure the Villain was beaten. Yet she wasn’t a *proper* hero.”

Mina’s fingers got caught in his hair. She sniffed and adjusted herself as she glanced down at her friend.

“She reminds me a lot of you, you know?”

Bakugou didn’t answer her, wasn’t aware of her words anymore.

“I thought to myself, ‘this guy’s an asshole,’ and then I thought... ‘so was she.’ And I thought I was being so generous... giving you a chance to prove me wrong.” Mina laughed. “Course you just proved me right. You are kind of an asshole, Blasty, but you are so much more than that.”

She hugged him tightly.

“That hero... a few years later I saw an article on her. She was forced out of hero work. I’m not like you or Midoriya. I didn’t think I’d be a hero going into middle school. I thought I’d do something else... extreme sports or dance or something. Then I see her. She looks so depressed. Just walking down the street. She passes me by and she doesn’t look up. Doesn’t see me at all and I realize I don’t even know her name.”

The thought still bothers her. She’s tried to look her up but no one seems familiar with the hero. No one seems to remember. Which is its own form of depressing.

“For the next... forever, I can’t get her out of my head. I can’t stop thinking that I wish there were more heroes like her out there, watching out for people like me, and the next thing I know I’m watching out for things out of place. I’m making sure the girls in my class are safe... I’m... trying to be that person.”

Yet she’d missed what was right in front of her.

She’d *missed* it completely.

Bakugou had been taken in the van and no hero had saved him. That’s what it felt like at least. She didn’t know what actually happened and she couldn’t ask. Bakugou couldn’t tell her. She needed to step up. She needed to be better.

Bakugou wouldn't be that hollow hero who walked past her without seeing. She wouldn't let people break her friend like they had her hero. She wouldn't let them take him away from her- from them. Bakugou was one of her boys and she'd be damned if she let Bakugou pass her by like she'd allowed that hero.

She would never allow herself to be that person again. Someone who knew another needed help and did nothing. Especially not someone who had helped her so much and done so many things for her.

She blinked the blurriness from her eyes. She couldn't sleep. She needed to be up and awake when the others woke up. Bakugou brushed up against her horn, his cheek against her shoulder.

She closed her eyes, her head dipping down without her consent. She could feel Bakugou's head beneath her own but she couldn't lift her head for anything. The sun was shining through the window. The others would probably be waki...

She slumped fully into sleep.

Chapter 18: Deku and Kacchan

Chapter Summary

Diving into the ever-complicated relationship of Deku and Kacchan.

The Bakugou's are coming

The chapter #'s jumped up again because my chapters I've been writing have been 20,000+ and I needed to break that down a bit and then figure out how to create better arcs for the individual chapters after I broke it down.

Deku and Kacchan need to get some things off their chest and the Bakugou's are coming

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Chapter 18: Deku & Kacchan

Izuku didn't know where he was. He knew that it wasn't the real world. Not with the way the One For All holders sat idly on columns high above him. The inky blackness that came with being in this space, dazzling lights of all colors shining off in the distance, was both a comfort and a worry to him.

“Hello?!”

They didn't respond. Izuku dug into the fold inside of him, full cowl streaking lightning around his form. He was about to leap upwards, to try to talk to them when he heard footfalls behind him.

“Don't you dare worry about me!”

Izuku turned sharply, the lightning shooting outwards, as if reacting to his surprise to see Kacchan standing there. Dark blackish circles under his eyes. Blood running down the front of his shirt. He looked worn

down. Exhausted.

Izuku felt his heart leap in concern.

“Kacchan, what... what are you doing here?”

Within the scope of One For All.

“Attack me! Why won’t you fight back?” Kacchan screamed. He pushed Izuku, but there was no force behind it. He blinked at the familiarity of those words. Déjà vu striking him like an All Might punch. This wasn’t actually Kacchan. It was more like... a memory. An impression. But why...?

“I don’t want to attack you. I don’t want to hurt you,” Izuku said slowly, looking around the encroaching black mist that swarmed them both, at the figures watching overhead. “What is this? Are you showing me this? Are you watching this? I don’t understand!”

“Why did I end up behind someone who was always so far behind me?” Kacchan agonized, his low gravelly voice harsh. Condemning. Izuku winced. Back then Kacchan had screamed his heart out, one thing after another. There hadn’t been any pauses in between the questions. No room for Izuku to respond in any way.

“Do you remember when we were kids, Kacchan? When we used to dream about being superhero partners? A duo? I never stopped chasing after that idea. Not the partners bit, I let that go somewhere along the way, but being an equal to you? I’ve wanted that more than anything. To have your respect.”

Izuku paused, glancing up at the figures. All Might’s grinning visage, teeth so blinding that even in the vague smoke like visage, that was still recognizable. The Quirk whip user with his head tilted and hand on his chin, intent on their figures.

“Why did a damn small fry like you get strong and become the number one hero’s sidekick- his favorite! You got so much better and I destroyed All Might!”

The pain in those words still haunted Izuku.

He reluctantly looked back at Kacchan, who was clutching at his heart, shaking.

That’s what it came down to. He’d wondered... hoped... Kacchan had

let go of those thoughts after All Might had explained everything. There had been a subdued aura around his childhood friend still. Something dark that remained after that conversation and Izuku had tried to distract him. Getting him to help with the training and working with him to try to find a solution to the All For One problem they had on their hands.

Kacchan had seemed to withdraw though. Further and further into himself despite the efforts he'd been making. Kirishima and the others had seemed to make it their life's goal to pull Kacchan out of his slump.

He'd hoped maybe Eri could crack him a bit, get him to open up, but that had just pissed him off. Surprise, surprise. Kacchan grabbed him by the front of his shirt, but it wasn't in an aggressive way, it was desperate. The angry tears of frustration and grief from that night slid down his face again and Izuku instinctively grabbed Kacchan's shoulders. His hands were slapped away like they had been then. Instead the anger turned to a lost expression.

"I admired him so much but it's because of me he ended up losing his power! If I had been stronger... if I hadn't been kidnapped by Villains then it never would have happened. All Might knows it's my fault but hadn't said anything. Everyone has to know though! I can't get it out of my head! It's like its constantly playing on loop. So what the hell am I supposed to do?!"

It's been months since that fight and Izuku still doesn't know what to do, what to say in response to this. It still shocks him. That even though he's known Kacchan since before preschool, he didn't see this coming. He'd had no idea what Kacchan had been thinking, blaming himself for All Might's retirement, for the League of Villains kidnapping him, for everything bad that had happened.

He hadn't known that Kacchan had spent their whole lives thinking Izuku looked down on him. That didn't even make sense. He still didn't get it. How had he come to that conclusion? When? What had Izuku ever done that had given Kacchan the idea that he looked down on him? That he was mocking him?

No matter how he turned it around in his head, he couldn't figure it out.

He'd always tried to be kind, to reach out, to help.

This moment had made him think though... Kacchan blamed himself

for every bad thing that happened during and after the camp incident. Everything. As long as he'd known Kacchan, Izuku had thought he was nothing but confidence, arrogance, and he was so mean sometimes.

When they got Kacchan back, Izuku made the assumption that Kacchan was fine. He still yelled and was still aggressive, still anti-social and uncooperative. As always, nothing seemed to deter him. Even being kidnapped and Izuku being one of the ones to rescue him hadn't fixed anything between them.

To hear these words.

It had shifted his entire view on how Kacchan thought.

Because if Izuku had been wrong in the weeks leading up to the Provisional License Exam then what else in their past had he been dead wrong about? How often had Kacchan's confidence and arrogance hidden things like this?

Had Izuku misunderstood as much as Kacchan had?

That thought had left him tossing and turning for weeks. From that point on Izuku had tried something a little different. Izuku stopped assuming he knew what Kacchan was thinking or why he did things. He stopped assuming the worst.

And it had been oddly illuminating.

The way Kacchan reacted to him was different. He was still aggressive, but the meanness was all but gone. And it wasn't anything outwards Izuku was doing. He was still doing the same things as always, but Izuku had shifted how he thought, just the smallest bit.

At first he was confused.

And then slowly, as Kacchan kept giving him startled looks, as Kacchan frowned at him and looked him up and down, as Kacchan searched his eyes during any time they spoke...

It had never been about what Izuku said or what he did.

It was his body language and the way he spoke. The more Izuku put in the effort not to assume, the more Kacchan loosened just the tiniest bit, the less hostile he was when they spoke.

And yeah, it didn't seem fair that Kacchan had been judging him on things he hadn't said or done. It definitely wasn't fair that he'd been so mean for so long or that he'd shut Izuku out for some affront that Izuku couldn't possibly know about. Kacchan had been making just as many assumptions about Izuku as he'd been making about Kacchan. From this past conversation, it seemed to Izuku that whatever grievance Kacchan had made up in his head about Izuku long ago had probably been grossly exaggerated.

In some weird twisted way that Izuku couldn't make heads or tails of, Izuku was earning Kacchan's forgiveness as much as Kacchan was attempting to earn Izuku's forgiveness.

Mind fuck right there.

That realization though had helped him forgive him though. He didn't understand. He might never understand because Kacchan was still being a anything but an open book, but he felt lighter and better able to handle his struggling relationship with Kacchan knowing what he knows now.

"I was surprised when All Might trusted you with his secret," Izuku admitted to Kacchan, the other still gripping onto his shirt tightly. He would never say this to Kacchan because he wasn't sure how the other boy would handle this confession, but he felt he'd been brought to this place for a reason. Maybe because he needed to get this off of his chest. "And I was a little resentful. It's complicated. I really wanted you to know, but I also hated the idea of you, of all people, knowing. Is it odd, that I kinda hated you for a long time and yet I admire you? And yet I also sort of love you too? You're basically my family. A really messed up one, but..."

Izuku smiled fondly, thinking of the words he'd caught Kacchan telling Eri.

"I... think of you as my brother as well."

Izuku gently pulled away, unclenching the fingers holding his shirt. Kacchan looked uncertain, still lost. Izuku took a breath before holding out his fist directly in front of Kacchan, like when they were kids, when they'd always give each other a fist bump before leaving.

"For better or worse, we're in this together, right?"

Kacchan shifted on his feet, eyes downcast, but he lifted his own hand, fingers clenching into a fist.

"I... you shitty nerd... I..."

Kacchan moved to bump his fist against Izuku's own.

And then Izuku woke up.

He stared at the ceiling for a long moment. The white, bland clinic roof looking nothing like the antique white columns that had surrounded him only a moment before.

'You couldn't have waited two more seconds could you,' Izuku thought to the universe at large. *'We were about to have a moment.'*

'Maybe if you weren't analyzing the situation for so long,' a snarky voice whispered, sounding suspiciously like his explosive friend's voice. *'Apparently you take too long to get shit done even in your dreams. Shitty nerd.'*

As if the universe agreed with the imaginary Kacchan's assessment, his neck creaked, and a groan escaped him, his body protesting the awkward position he was laying in. The uncomfortable chair he was sleeping in had

Kacchan arguing. Where once that would fill him with wariness and exasperation, now it sparked a thrill through him. He sat up in his chair, feeling a creak in his neck, he staggered to his feet, careful not to jostle Todoroki, and slammed into the door frame as he entered the clinic Kacchan had been dying in not so long ago.

"I can piss by my fucking self, thanks," Kacchan snapped.

Izuku blinked a few times, taking in the sight of his childhood friend still wearing his combat pants, but shoeless and wearing a billowing medical shirt and bracelet. There were wires that Kacchan was pulling off his skin and a needle Recovery Girl was removing, her hand holding his arm in a vice like, white knuckled grip as he argued with All Might. The retired hero looked torn between exasperation and amusement.

"And you can, young Bakugou, but it might be best if someone helps you walk there. There's no reason to strain yourself after the seizures you had last night."

Oh...

Not amusement.

Relief.

“Don’t be a little bitch,” Ashido moaned. Izuku startled, not having seen her half asleep in the chair by the bed. “Just let him heeeeeeeelp you! You know he’s going to be personally offended and have his feelings all hurt if he can’t help in some way.”

All Might sputtered. Izuku had to cover his mouth to keep from laughing. Kacchan looked like he’d swallowed a lemon as he glared at the pink skinned girl. Izuku pressed his lips together, only holding himself back long enough for Recovery Girl to bandage Kacchan’s arm, but the moment she finished, the moment Kacchan was free of the needle, he was across the room and flinging himself onto Kacchan in sheer relief.

“What the fuck, Deku?! Stop blubbering all over me you piece of shit!”

Izuku cried harder.

“God fucking damn it! I have to piss you fucking pintsized gremlin, get off!” Ashido, halfway between stretching like a cat, fell over herself laughing. “Stop laughing loser!”

And then Kacchan grunted and Izuku found himself taking all of his weight against him. Kacchan’s chin hitting his shoulder as he went absolutely boneless for a second, eyes threatening to roll into the back of his head. And Izuku was abruptly reminded of where he was and why, his hands grabbing Kacchan’s waist in shock.

“Young Bakugou!” All Might moved to help him, but Kacchan- using Izuku as a crutch, forced himself back up and glared at all of them, shaking Izuku’s hold free. There was a white knuckled grip on Izuku’s forearm though that seemed to be all that was keeping Kacchan upright and even though it hurt a bit, there was no way he would force his stubborn friend to let go when there was a flash of panic in the normally confident figure.

“Just... let me use the fucking restroom, okay? I’m not traversing the galaxy you nitwits,” Kacchan snapped.

But Kacchan wasn’t letting go of him.

He seemed stuck where he was, barely standing, but unwilling to admit it. His breathing labored and rasping. Kacchan took one step away from him and Izuku watched in wide eyed concern as Kacchan’s knees wobbled. He clenched his teeth hard enough it seemed

something might crack. Izuku took a step backward, closer towards the bathroom so that Kacchan wouldn't feel the need to let go immediately.

He knew better than to say anything out loud as the blonde moved with him.

Kacchan's face scrunched up, his mouth turning downwards as he noticed Izuku's movements, but he didn't say anything. Didn't snap at him or let go. So Izuku took another step back and another, keeping his face neutral and not raising his hand to help Kacchan even when there were a few moments where it looked like he might slip to the floor. Face pale and looking like he might vomit.

Kacchan made the final five feet to the door by lurching away from Izuku and grabbing hold of the doorknob in what was surely a strangle hold, clutching the metal for several long moments before finally turning it and disappearing inside.

Izuku winced as what sounded like a limb smacking tile. Violent cursing pretty much confirming it. He turned to look at All Might, wanting a better explanation for last night, but the man shook his head.

'Later,' he mouthed.

Right.

Right, they couldn't talk about this with Kacchan near.

Izuku bit his lip to keep from speaking. He'd almost messed up within the first ten minutes of being around Kacchan. He glanced at Ashido who no longer had any traces of the laughter from before. She'd half ridden from her seat, looking like she was ready to jump in had Izuku needed it. As it stands, she looked like she wanted to break the bathroom door down. Maybe pull what Sero and Kirishima did a few days ago. He gave her a weak smile that she returned half-heartedly.

He'd seen the door.

Todoroki had volunteered to keep it in his room since there was zero chance of Kacchan going into the dual eyed student's dorm space. The class had taken turns covering the door in ribbons and bows, small little messages written on tags. It was going to be a Christmas joke. And knowing Kacchan either those ribbons would come off immediately or they'd be there until they graduated.

“Why are all of you here?” Kacchan asks as he steps out of the bathroom a few minutes later, leaning too heavily on the frame for it to be casual, but looking a little more put together than before. “Don’t think I didn’t see the others outside in the hallway. That’s not fucking necessary. Tell them to go back to the dorms.”

“They want to see you,” Izuku said simply, earnestly. “You’re their friend.”

Kacchan looks away from him, away from everyone in the room as he finds the one spot where there isn’t a person hanging out and stares at it like it’s the best part of the whole place. Like he wants to sink into the floor. It’s a look Izuku feels like he should be able to say that he’s never seen before, but that would be a lie. He’s seen that look plenty of times.

“Well... they’re a bunch of idiots then, because they have perfectly good beds not even ten minutes away and now those assholes are going to be having cricks in their necks and there probably gonna be cranky asswipes the whole day.”

“Kacchan...” he feels the exasperation sliding into his tone, despite trying to keep it at bay.

“Awwwwwwweee,” Ashido croons, startling Izuku. “Such loving concern for us, Blasty! I’m touched.”

“Shut up.”

Izuku’s eyes widen at the lack of denial. Concern. He glances at Ashido, the girl has a wild grin on her face as she leaps out of the chair she’s draped across and throws her arms around Kacchan. She’s not insulted at all despite clearly being one of the ‘idiots.’

“You don’t need to worry about us, Blasty,” she poked him in the chest. “We’re fine and we’re not inconvenienced by being here.”

Kacchan has his arms folded and his eyes are downcast.

Izuku blinks as those words sink in and the body language presenting itself before him.

He’d been annoyed by Kacchan’s dismissal of his classmate’s actions. Exasperated by his childhood friend’s stubbornness. Grated that even now Kacchan would slide into insults against the people who were worried about him.

He'd slipped into old behavior so easily. On assumptions.

Concerned. Worried. Feeling like he was inconveniencing others. It was the complete opposite of what Izuku had thought was being said. Izuku looked at Ashido and Kacchan, the close proximity and the way that while Kacchan was guarded he still allowed the contact.

'We've always... misunderstood each other,' the bitter thought dips its toes into his mind. He knows... on the surface that they didn't click. He'd come to partially realize that when they fought at Ground Beta. How he hadn't known at all, hadn't suspected that Kacchan blamed himself for All Might's end, that he believed *everyone* blamed him for All Might's end. And here was just another example of not getting it.

From the moment he'd been rescued, Kacchan had been nothing but confidant and aggressive. There had been nothing to suggest otherwise. No signs that Izuku can remember. Kacchan had been his normal, grumpy, passionate self.

Hearing what Kacchan thought Izuku had thought of him... that Kacchan believed Izuku looked down on him, was patronizing him... [him the quirkless kid! Looking down on Kacchan with all of his talent and his powerful quirk]. He'd thought the idea was absurd. Utterly ridiculous. How could Kacchan think that when Izuku had stated directly that he looked up to him? How could Kacchan take Izuku's actions and words and twist them until they were unrecognizable?

But...

Here was a small glimmer of how Izuku himself took Kacchan's own words and mistranslated them. Twisted them into something entirely different. At least... the emotions and intentions behind the words.

How much of the tension between them was caused by these moments?

"Why don't I bring you breakfast! I'll make it myself," Ashido announced, dragging Kacchan towards the bed, her hand slung casually around his waist, but her muscles were tensed as she held all of Kacchan's weight against her. The smile never dropped from her face, never looked strained.

She made it look so easy. There was no sign of the strained, tense reluctant and painfully slow walk just minutes prior that had been between the two of them. Kacchan didn't fight or resent it. He hardly seemed to notice at all. There was no acknowledgment of the help. No

big deal made about it. It looked easy, effortless, by her hands.

They all did, really- Kirishima, Kaminari, Sero. They interacted with Kacchan as if it was a natural thing. They teased and insulted each other all the time. Pushed and pulled and yelled and argued and were on equal footing.

The familiar pit of jealousy Izuku felt every once in a while opened up again. It was something he didn't acknowledge because the feeling was beneath him. These were his friends too and the last thing that was needed was for him to be resentful or angry with his friends because they were able to do what Izuku could not.

What he struggled to work towards each and every day since childhood.

"Fuck no, you freak! Last time you turned everything green! Wake Sero's ass up."

He flinched at the harsh words, but Ashido beamed and Izuku was left with a widening realization. Even after Ground Beta, he'd believed it was Kacchan who was misunderstanding his words. That Izuku himself had made a habit of assuming to know what was being said, but he'd believed that he would know what Kacchan meant if he simply opened up... and...

Maybe Kacchan had been open from the start about how he felt. Maybe the problem wasn't trying to get Kacchan to talk like he had at Ground Beta, but better understanding what Kacchan meant when he did speak.

It was a hard pill to swallow and a bitter one. He felt that familiar resentment bubbling up. The idea that it was always Izuku going the extra mile to make things work. Maybe though... maybe Kacchan had been trying just as much as him.

But it was also a problem Izuku wasn't entirely sure how to go about fixing. He pictured asking Kirishima for translations every time Kacchan spoke and wondering how pissed off their volatile friend would be if he tried that.

"What's with that dumb face, Deku?" Kacchan snapped.

He looked up to see scarlet eyes ringed with sleep deprivation boring into him, sizing him up. Arms crossed. Guarded. Bandages wrapped tightly around his left arm. There was tension in his shoulders as

Kacchan studied him, the medical garb hanging too loose around his frame. His mouth turned downward in a frown. Izuku squirmed under the intense gaze and aggressive demand, but glanced at Ashido, whose own poster was relaxed beside the bed, her own gaze curious.

Honesty.

They'd promised to try to be better at communicating with one another and that would never happen if he kept doing the same thing he's always done. Izuku straightened his shoulders and stared Kacchan right in the eye.

"I was thinking of bribing Kirishima into translating what you say into normal speak so the rest of us can better understand you?" It came out like a question even though he hadn't meant for it to. Izuku tried for a cheeky grin, to give it more confidence. "You're practically a foreign language."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean, shitty nerd?! I'm perfectly fucking understandable! Your pea sized brain just can't wrap its mind around my extensive arsenal of words, shitstain."

Ashido glanced at Izuku, a wicked smile stretching across her face.

"Translation: I approve of you growing a spine, but you suck at clever banter."

"What the fuck, Horns?!"

"Translation: You're supposed be to on my side, not his."

"I'll say what I fucking want to say."

"Translation: I don't need a translator. I'm perfect."

Izuku covered his mouth, trying to stifle the laughter as Kacchan grabbed his pillow and hit Ashido across the face with it. She partially dodged, but the ruckus had drawn attention from the hall.

The others were waking up.

Mitsuki gets the call well into the morning. Masaru has his arms

wrapped around Mitsuki's waist and his chin in the crook of her neck. They're in the kitchen and he's cooking while she's getting in the way. So... he's decided to cook with her between him and the stove, purposefully throwing ingredients down her shirt and murmuring 'oops' in the most deadpan voice he can manage, 'guess I'll just have to get that later.'

She leans back too heavily, forcing most of her weight onto the man as he sautés the onions. Both she and Masaru hate breakfast food so despite it being before noon, he's preparing stuffed bell peppers with steak and Cajun spiced pasta.

It was one of Katsuki's favorites, but Masaru was rusty. He'd been cooking his son's favorite meals all week as practice for when he came home for his holiday vacation. He didn't want to mess anything up. Plus there were a few on the list Mitsuki mentioned that he was sure Katsuki hadn't been eating the last time Masaru had been the full-time cook of the family.

When the cell starts to ring, Mitsuki raises both her eyebrows, the skewer she'd stolen and speared a simmering- probably too raw to eat if he's honest, piece of meat pausing half-way to her mouth. Masaru tries to take the piece back to put on the stove again while she ducks out of his arms, but the spear veers towards him in such a way that he knows she'll stab him with it if he tries to take it.

He holds up his hands in surrender.

"If you get sick, you're sleeping on the couch!" He warns, entirely serious. Chivalry was dead when it came to dealing with a woman as stubborn and persistent as Mitsuki Bakugou. He'd long ago learned that while holding open doors was cute- its only true purpose wasn't to help his wife, but to ensure the door wasn't broken as she busted through it. She would do what she wanted to do but there was no way in hell he was dealing with all the repercussions of what she wanted.

She looked him in the eye, biting viciously down on the undercooked, slightly raw food. There was a tiny twitch of her eye that told him she regretted that decision, a small movement of her lips. There were portions of that meat that probably still tasted slimy on her tongue.

Mitsuki pretended neither happened though as she took the whole bit further into her mouth and bit down on it. Being as vulgar as possible as she chewed, swallowed, and licked her lips.

"Delicious."

“I’m sure.”

She answered the phone on the last ring, turning pointedly away from him, hand on hip. He turned back to his cooking, shaking his head. Stubbornness a thousand miles long. Completely unreasonable in all aspects.

Masaru turned back to his cooking.

Katsuki would be home soon and he’d have a partner in cooking that didn’t eat his raw ingredients and make a nuisance of himself. Though his son and wife found other ways to cause trouble. Always arguing with each other and sniping over the silliest of stuff.

“What?” The sharp voice of his wife cut his fond thoughts in half. He glanced over at Mitsuki whose shoulders had gone stiff, back still turned to him. “I don’t... how long has this been going on? Why weren’t we contacted before?!”

Design work?

Maybe Fujina hadn’t been as capable of handling the department as they thought. It had only been a few days though. Who... Masaru’s blood runs cold.

“I’m sick. Aizawa’s making me stay in the dorms to get better for the next few days. They’re making me heated support gear to help me in everyday life instead of just hero gear.”

“What are you saying?” Mitsuki whispers. “I want to talk to Katsuki! Put Katsuki on the phone!”

Masaru turned the stove off, his hands shaking. Why didn’t he check on him? He’d known Katsuki had gotten sick. He’d known. And with their medical history, with Masaru’s medical history, he should have...

What if Katsuki had Quirimorbus?

No.

Katsuki knew the signs. He was checked out every year. There was no way he would ignore that. Something else must have happened. Must have.

“Mitsuki?” He asked. “What’s wrong with Katsuki?”

His wife stood tall. Her face stone as she listened to the person on the

other side of the phone call. From the look on her face it was clear he wasn't going to like what they had to say. Masaru braced himself against the counter as his wife's face contorted in anger. It was only because he knew her so well, for so many years, that he recognized the touch of panic under the blossoming aggravation.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?!"

Masaru left the food on the stovetop. He slipped his shoes on and grabbed the car keys, grabbing their coats and slipping it over Mitsuki's shoulders. Her fingers touched his, grabbing his wrist and squeezing.

"We'll be there in thirty," she said sharply, ending the call without further ado.

Masaru didn't comment on the briskness.

"Katsuki?" He asked faintly.

"It's not good," she answered. "They said there were things they could only explain when we got there. Things that could only be explained in person."

Masaru closed his eyes, taking a deep breath.

"You don't think..." she whispered.

"No. No, its... not possible. Katsuki would have said something."

There was a pregnant pause between them.

Would he have? Truly?

Sweet Katsuki who always made sure he took his meds. Who stayed up with him on his rough nights and played music for him, who turned on his favorite audio books in the morning so that Masaru would wake up to the voices he loved the most. Stories of space exploration and adventure, of heroes and warriors. They did nothing to make the painless, but it made him feel more than just the pain and it gave him the illusion that time was moving faster than it was.

Katsuki who made him dinner and set it down outside his door.

Katsuki who lowered his voice when Masaru was around.

Katsuki who took care to be as gentle as he could despite the fact that

it really wasn't in his nature.

His sweet little boy who everyone talked about like he was a Villain.

He'd never doubted Katsuki would be a hero. Not because of his power or his keen intelligence or even his endurance. It was because of the little things he did that no one seemed to notice. How we went out of his way to help people. The rapt attention he gave to those he respected or cared about.

Masaru pinched the bridge of his nose as Mitsuki put her shoes on.

'Please, please, hasn't he already been through enough? Not my Katsuki.'

They didn't make it there in thirty minutes.

They made it there in fifteen.

Deku had tea.

Katsuki eyed him suspiciously from his spot on the window, but the nerd just smiled at him as he set it down. His eyes were strained, and the smile didn't reach his eyes. He hated this shit. This insincere shit where people were pretending around him that everything was fine.

Aizawa had filtered his classmates through one or two at a time. They'd had their little crying, hugging, lecturing fits and Katsuki had told them to go be productive members of society. So they'd gone and decided to exercise and spar right outside his clinic window like the not subtle shits that they were.

Deku had drawn straws against the idiot squad, but Katsuki wasn't born yesterday. He'd seen the- admittedly versatile way the bastard had used his whip quirk to shorten the straw he'd drawn when no one was looking. The cheating little shit had just shrugged helplessly at all of his friend's disappointed looks as the lying bastard held up his far too short one.

"I promise I'll come get you when its your turn," Deku had told Sero warmly, the son of a bitch who actually won and just didn't know it because they were all gullible fools for Deku's 'innocent act.'

He swears to fucking god he doesn't know how people can be so blinded by a few kind words and manners. And Sero had *thanked him*.

Katsuki could have called him out for it, but his classmates have all proven they love the wool Deku's pulled over their eyes and they won't have any of Katsuki's sip of reality ruining their nice little box they've dropped Deku into.

He supposes that he should be thankful Deku's bullshit works so well or half the fucking country would know the secret of One For All by now. Todoroki and his god damn conspiracy theories only add to the gossip mill going around and he supposes having the sprinkling of idiocy all over the place in future headlines will only help Deku's case in hiding what is really going on but god damn it if it isn't the most ridiculous shit show to watch.

A part of him wanted to know why the fuck Deku was here... why he cared so fucking much that he'd been willing to do that underhanded trick... but he had a better idea than he would have at the start of the year.

It wasn't like before.

Katsuki still felt like a monster sometimes... when people saw their class and he could see their eyes moving from Katsuki to Deku. Sizing them up. Finding Katsuki lacking. But it wasn't coming from their classmates anymore and it wasn't coming from Deku... so it was more bearable than before.

The hot steaming mugs were placed on the bedside table and Katsuki hopped up, looking down to smell the deceptive fruity aroma of Earl Grey that tasted nothing like fruit (like the black tea wanted to be herbal fake shit). The bitter taste rolled onto his tongue even as Deku made some comment about it being too hot to drink.

Pussy.

He gulped it.

Deku sighed at him, placing a magazine onto the clinic tabletop. Katsuki picked it up, frowning at the cover. He knew this magazine. At least, he had seen the crest in the corner somewhere before. Black lettering and outline set against purple and blue. A black arrow going downwards that separated the black letters. A black circle around all of it.

"What's this?" He asked, stabbing the magazine.

"Quirk News. It talks about the latest and most interesting quirks to

come about,” Deku chirped as he straightened the room, picking up things that his friends had left half-hazardly about the place. “Analyzes them. Interviews people on their thoughts. Different versatilities of them.”

“Experts or gossip?” He asked, flipping the magazine open.

“Erm... well, I mean, I don’t think they have doctors or scien...”

“Gossip column then,” Katsuki said dismissively, tossing the magazine back onto the table.

“It’s important to see what normal people think too, Kacchan,” Deku said reproachfully. “Even if they aren’t experts, what they have to say is still important.”

“And why is that?”

“They are who we’re fighting for, you know, and knowing how they think and how they feel about different kinds of quirks is important to helping us understand the general public’s opinion and why and how it shifts.”

“I don’t need to know any of that shit. I already know how they think and feel about me,” Katsuki grumbled.

“And about heroes in general? Or about quirks?”

Katsuki shrugged.

“I get the basic idea,” he mumbled.

Deku’s eyebrows raised in the same way Auntie Inko’s did when she caught you lying. Katsuki sneered and looked away.

“Public opinion is almost always wrong. It’s better to keep your focus on those who know what the fuck their talking about.”

“There’s plenty of ideas and aspects of people’s quirks that aren’t covered by the experts though,” Deku said, his voice taking on a touch of frustration.

“Whoop-dee fucking do, Deku. The extras can put two and two together,” Katsuki growled, trying to restrain himself. “Can we just fucking drop this shit? I don’t want to read your gossip trash.”

“It could help you though, learning about different types of quirks out

there...”

“Which I get by reading the registry every year when it comes out.”

“How quirks affect people’s lives.”

“New Laws and legislation, court cases, medical cases,” Katsuki named off the top of his head.

“The different uses quirks can provide in the home and businesses.”

“Scientific magazines!” Katsuki snapped.

“Emotions are important too!” Deku snapped. “Culture and people are important too!” Katsuki’s hands sparked as he tried to reign in his anger. Deku had folded his arms across his chest and was glaring back defiantly. Fuck. Every single god damn time. “Dismissing how everyone else looks at the world and how they work in it isn’t good. Shutting yourself out from the world and only listening in to the experts means isolating yourself from the people we’re going to be protecting!”

“Maybe I don’t want anything to do with them!” Katsuki snapped, just as heatedly. “Maybe I’m perfectly happy isolating myself from everyone but the best!”

“That’s a lie!”

“Oh yeah? You a mind reader now? A fucking bonified Katsuki Bakugou expert? You know all and see all Deku?!”

“You wouldn’t have let all of us in here if you really thought that!”

Katsuki got out of the bed, fast as a viper, standing over Deku and leaning forward so he was in the pain in the ass’s face.

“Every one of those fucking idiots has proven their elite. Even that god damn twinkle toes knows how to get shit done when it matters. Don’t say shitty things like that, you god damn nerd. Now take your trash and get the fuck out. You’re pissing me off.”

Katsuki tossed the magazine the nerd’s way, watching as he struggled not to drop it. He turned his back on the shitty nerd, not seeing the shocked expression that crossed Deku’s face or the way it creased into a pleased smile.

Chapter End Notes

So I was forced to break this monster of a chapter up into three parts because it was 20,000+ which, of course, caused the chapter #'s to go up again.

Chapter 18: Deku and Kacchan

Chapter 19: Chargebolt

(Denki has a past and that comes in handy)

Chapter 20: Game Plan

(The Police and Aizawa + teachers have a plan, but they are going to need the Bakugou's permission and help)

All three chapters were supposed to be ONE chapter, so if it doesn't seem like a lot happens in chapter 18 that's because it was only the first part of the chapter and I got overzealous in diving into the brotherly love/hate/irritation/fondness

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